

LETTERS ON LIFE  
CLAUDIUS CLEAR



*Ex Libris*

C. K. OGDEN



THE LIBRARY  
OF  
THE UNIVERSITY  
OF CALIFORNIA  
LOS ANGELES

.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2008 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation





LETTERS  
ON LIFE




# LETTERS ON LIFE

BY

CLAUDIUS CLEAR



LONDON: HODDER AND  
STOUGHTON   27  
PATERNOSTER ROW MCMII

---

*Printed by Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ltd., London and Aylesbury.*

5110  
N 5472

TO  
M. B. AND J. M. B.  
IN MEMORY OF  
OUR AMERICAN JOURNEY  
AND  
MANY OTHER THINGS



# Contents

	PAGE
I. THE ART OF LIFE . . . . .	I
II. THAT LITERATURE IS AUTOBIOGRAPHY .	14
III. THE ART OF CONVERSATION . . . .	25
IV. ON THE ART OF TAKING THINGS COOLLY .	36
V. VANITY AND ITS MORTIFICATIONS . . .	47
VI. SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT HOLIDAYS . .	58
VII. "WHEN THREE STARS CAME OUT" . .	69
VIII. MIDNIGHT TEA . . . . .	80
IX. FIRING OUT THE FOOLS . . . . .	88
X. "A FELLOW BY THE NAME OF ROWAN" .	100
XI. TAKING GOOD MEN INTO CONFIDENCE .	113
XII. THE SIN OF OVERWORK . . . . .	121
XIII. SAMUEL . . . . .	130



# Contents



	PAGE
XIV. HOW TO REMEMBER AND HOW TO FORGET	138
XV. "R.S.V.P." . . . . .	149
XIV. CONCERNING ORDER AND METHOD. .	158
XVII. SHOULD OLD LETTERS BE KEPT? . .	168
XVIII. THE SECRET OF MRS. FARFRAE . .	180
XIX. BRILLIANCE . . . . .	192
XX. ON HANDWRITING . . . . .	201
XXI. THE HAPPY LIFE . . . . .	210
XXII. THE MAN IN THE STREET . . . .	219
XXIII. THE ZEST OF LIFE . . . . .	227
XXIV. GOOD MANNERS . . . . .	233
XXV. ON GROWING OLD . . . . .	247
XXVI. BROKEN-HEARTED . . . . .	259
XXVII. THE INNERMOST ROOM . . . . .	270



# I

## *The Art of Life*

AT the end of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Grandfather's Chair*, after the Chair has told many stories, it is asked by the Grandfather to confer a final favour. "'During an existence of more than two centuries you have had a familiar intercourse with men who were esteemed the wisest of their day. Doubtless with your capacious understanding you have treasured up many an invaluable lesson of wisdom. You certainly have had time enough to guess the riddle of life. Tell us poor mortals, then, how we may be happy.' The Chair assumed an aspect of deep meditation, and at last beckoned to Grandfather with its elbow, and made a step sideways towards him as if it had a very important secret to communicate. 'As long as I have stood in the midst of human affairs,' said the Chair, with a very oracular enunciation, 'I



## *The Art of Life*



have constantly observed that Justice, Truth, and Love are the chief ingredients of every happy life.' 'Justice, Truth, and Love!' exclaimed Grandfather. 'We need not exist two centuries to find out that these qualities are essential to our happiness. This is no secret. Every human being is born with the instinctive knowledge of it.' 'Ah!' cried the Chair, drawing back in surprise, 'from what I have observed of the dealings of man with man, of nation with nation, I should never have suspected that they knew this all-important secret.' The Chair announced that its lips are closed for the next hundred years. 'At the end of that period, if I shall have discovered any new precepts of happiness better than what heaven has already taught you, they shall assuredly be given to the world.' Here we have the explanation of the fact that precepts on the conduct of life often read like trite, threadbare, incontestable platitudes, and that many are inclined to deny that there is such an art as the art of living. A good heart, sound principles, and an honest purpose, it is said, will bring you safely through, and the experience of other travellers is of small account.



## *The Art of Life*



It is not so. Life is never the smooth path it seems to confident youth. It is a rough road cut with dangerous ruts, and apparently little mended by the successive generations of pilgrims. The highest wisdom is to be found in commonplaces. The best help that can be rendered to humanity is the representation of commonplaces as they are confirmed and illuminated by experience. Pascal said that the best books were the books which each man thought he could have written for himself. Few men imagine that they could have written great scientific or historical books. They all think themselves capable of writing observations of life and manners, and in a sense they are, for they have had the opportunities of acquiring the knowledge on which such observations must be founded. La Bruyère, one of the greatest writers on the art of life, says: "I restored to the public what it has lent me."

So through the ages we have a line of books on conduct written by men and women of very varying powers, and yet all are valuable in some way, if they are written honestly from a real experience. Often the lessons of life are



## *The Art of Life*



best conveyed indirectly. Thus we have a significant, if not very extensive, literature of characters. In Professor Jebb's admirable preface to his edition of *Theophrastus*—a book which should not have been allowed to go out of print—we have many excellent remarks on character writing. A very good second is Mr. Alfred West's introduction to the Pitt Press edition of Earle's *Microcosmography*. Mr. West describes the books of Joseph Hall, of Sir Thomas Overbury, of Samuel Butler, and others. Perhaps it scarcely was within his scope to set forth the singular merits of William Law's character sketches, which are, on the whole, the most finished and satisfactory in English literature. But even Law himself must yield without a struggle to La Bruyère. Of him no less a critic than Sainte Beuve said :

“Happy La Bruyère ! When so many more lofty glories have sunk, when the eighteenth century has passed away, and men speak of it as of an old fashion—when the seventeenth itself is exposed to attack on all sides, to the irreverence and incredulity of new schools—he, as if by a miracle, is alone respected, he alone



## *The Art of Life*



holds his own, he is spared. What do I say? He is read, he is admired, he is praised, precisely for the marked, incisive manner, a little too strong perhaps for his own time, but which is no more than we require now. Of this style he remains the first model. Fénelon, all Fénelon, pales and trembles; but his colours stand as bright as when first laid on the canvas. Time has deprived his solid and vigorous manner of no excellence. The artist has not ceased to reverence him. . . . He is still everybody's classic."

Among later writers no one has more deeply considered the art of life than Walter Pater, though I do not forget the quiet but sterling merits of such authors as Arthur Helps, P. G. Hamerton and Anne Mozley.

In teaching the art of life there can be no more useful books than biographies. I have for years read every biography I could lay my hands on, and not one has failed to teach me something. Mrs. Oliphant, who was herself a skilful biographer, and who observed life more shrewdly and keenly than most, has a passage in which she describes the fascination of watching



## *The Art of Life*



from the gallery the combat of a human soul, its defeats, its victories, and its last issues. A very able writer of recent times has said the worst that can be said against biographies, and especially the biographies of prophets and sages. The prophets of the Highest, says he, are degraded and despoiled by ill-judging biographers who in truth's name lay bare the life, not of the man whom they pretend to honour, but of his meaner and mortal double. Of the greater men in any generation, poets, orators, preachers, prophets, biographies should not be written. "Let them be as voices crying, if in that cry they deliver themselves in some measure from the material encumbrances of life. Let them be advantaged thereby themselves, and advantage their hearers. Why replace the voice in its fleshly tabernacle?" He goes on to compare the practice of biographers to the art of embalming. It preserves bodies of men in a sort of ghastly caricature of those who once wore them. "For a shorter time or a longer it preserves from entire decay that which it better had suffered to perish, but it cannot aid in perpetuating the crying voice or the spirit that, begotten from



## *The Art of Life*



God, partakes in God's eternity and infinitude. Nay, it tends to abridge the voice's compass and curtail the spirit's power to suffer." He might have said with perfect justice that autobiography even more than biography gives a less favourable impression than that made on contemporary observers by the actual characters of its subjects. It may be that a man cannot directly reveal himself, and that his autobiography is written rather in his less personal books than in the book which professes to give his own account of himself. There are luminous exceptions, no doubt, but in a good many cases a man's deliberate self-portraiture is both libellous and indistinct, giving perhaps the picture of a mind occupied with its own past, and reflecting its aspect in the solitude of self-communion, but giving no true idea of what the man was in relation to others. Thus one of the least amiable autobiographies is that of Mark Pattison, in which, as a critic of the time remarked, he stamped with a strange concession of authenticity a supposed caricature of himself in a clever novel. Yet Pattison was a man of whom one of his intimates said, "In *tête-à-tête* he possessed



## *The Art of Life*



in a rare degree what seems to me essential to good talk—a vivid consciousness of the person to whom he was speaking.” And he was the man who put the question, “What is most worth living for?” and answered it thus: “To deliver one’s message.” Nevertheless when all is said and done, the world would not part willingly either with its biographies or autobiographies. The lessons of life are not won lightly, and all that is said against biography reduces itself in the end to this—that the ultimate secret of any human personality remains a secret after all observation and all research and all expression have done their best or worst.

That there is an art of life which needs to be cultivated may be shown by various examples. Especially the need is clear when we turn to life’s most intimate relations. We are apt to take for granted that natural affection will make them all that they should be without thought or painstaking. A man and woman marry ; they are heartily in love with each other. What more is necessary for a happy life? Much more is necessary. Happiness is neither a vested right





## *The Art of Life*



nor a self-maintaining state. What is necessary is to make sure that love shall not only last, but grow stronger. It is not a matter of course that this should come to pass. It takes skill and science to maintain life through life's various stages, and both the man and the woman must do their part. La Bruyère, I believe, never married, but the story of a young girl is woven through the texture of his life. His ideal woman was woman in her early girlhood. After that period, he thought that she deteriorated, that she did not cultivate her gifts, that her moral sense was injured, that she indulged a natural repugnance for things serious and difficult, and that great beauty did nothing more for her than to lead her to hope for a great fortune. He believed, indeed, that a beautiful woman with the qualities of a worthy man had the merit of both sexes, and was the most delightful companion in the world. But of these there were very few, and so he was content to regard woman with a kind of fatherly tenderness. The bookseller to whose shop he daily repaired to turn over the new books and hear what was going on, had a bright little daughter, with whom he



## *The Art of Life*



made friends. One day when playing with the child he took out of his pocket the manuscript of his great work, and offered it to the bookseller, saying, "If you get anything by it, let it be the *dot* of my little friend here." When the girl married, her husband received with her a fortune of a hundred thousand livres. Married people must look forward to the close of one stage of life, and prepare for the other. This can only be done by self-denial, by the resolute endeavour on both sides to maintain a community of existence. The marriage that is truly successful is the marriage where each becomes by degrees necessary to the completeness of the other's life, and that happiness will grow more and more if each grows side by side with the other. It is so with the family. Parents must not take for granted that their sons and daughters will love them simply on the strength of the natural bond. They have to win the affection of their children. If they do not they will find that the children will have thoughts and ways of their own into which the parents are not permitted to enter. There are some pathetic passages in the life of the great scholar, F. J.



## *The Art of Life*



A. Hort, where he laments that his dreadful shyness has interfered with his knowledge of his children. He was eminently unselfish. He would put aside the most engrossing work when his children sought him ; he desired to know all that was passing in the nursery world. But he complained of the unwholesome reserve which kept them at a distance, "the main cause of which, whatever the other causes may have been, has been my own miserable shyness, which has cruelly disabled me as a father among you all." Many do not strive for the prize as Hort did, and they miss it, and miss with it much of the best of life. The same is true about brothers and sisters. Every one must have observed in large families apparently happy together that each one lived his own life, that they knew very little of one another. To those who do not know how much strength and joy can be gained by the perfect co-mingling of interests between father, mother, sons, and daughters, this will appear an unspeakable loss ; but many are apparently satisfied to share the shelter of the same roof, and have very little else in common, and yet be contented enough. There are many wives



## *The Art of Life*



who know nothing of what their husbands are doing, many husbands who know nothing and care nothing as to what their wives are doing, and yet they would be the first to say that their marriages are happy. They are happy after a fashion, but not after the true fashion.

Again, an attention to the art of life will help us to make the best of ourselves and the best of things. For the sake of happiness as well as for greater reasons we should try to do our work in the world, and the finely tempered nature will never be satisfied if the rust eats into the unused blade. By a wise conduct we may avoid the lurid lights and the horrible, creeping shadows. We shall not spend the first years of life in a way to make the last miserable. Even the "powerful distemper of old age," as Montaigne called it, may not mar our happiness. The mere fact of reaching old age is a proof, I think, that life has not been miserable, that more sunshine than shadow has fallen upon it. When we are old we should find something to exercise the faculties that remain. The Cumberland beggar had the surest mark of old age.



## *The Art of Life*



He had always seemed old to the people in his valley.

Him from childhood I have known, and then

He was so old ; he seems not older now.

But the secret of his continuance was that he still "travelled on." I have heard of a man of ninety-two, whose life had been spent in an incredible round of toil. He made it his business when he could do no more to study the stars. His last office led him into the open air, and his last words were, "How clear the moon shines to-night !"

## II

### *That Literature is Autobiography*

THE other day I came across an observation which set me thinking. It was to the effect that autobiographies are a very unimportant part of our literary treasure. Taking it in the literal sense, this is not true. Taking it with a broad construction, it is so utterly false that it may even be plausibly asserted that all the enduring part in literature is autobiography.

This is a bold saying, and I must at the outset define my terms. There are many formal autobiographies which are not literature in any sense; that is, they are neither sincere nor in any way complete. In other words, they are not autobiographies. Perhaps the truest autobiographies are those which do not take the prescribed form—which are indirect. Very few people have the courage to tell the true story of their lives. There is a noble modesty

## 🍷 Literature is Autobiography 🍷

---

of the soul which makes it impossible to draw the veil back which hides from the world its hopes and its joys, its losses and wounds and sacrifices, the struggles, the victories and the defeats of conscience. An autobiography may be true so far as it goes, but unless it admits the reader into the sanctuary of life it makes no impression. This is perhaps the reason why stories written in the first person singular so rarely attain success. To the young an autobiographical novel appears the easiest. In reality it is the most difficult, and I doubt whether it has ever been successfully accomplished, save by those who have directly or indirectly unveiled the inner secrets of their heart. Often the person who writes it gives no true picture of his experience in the world of action or in the world of thought. He tries to make imagination do a work for which it is not competent. For example, a commonplace prosperous man, incapable of any deeper feeling, may write a novel which he intends to be steeped in melancholy. But the book turns out unreal, mawkish, maudlin, describing not a real agony, but a dull and dismal languor of weakness. Those who have read Lamartine's *Jocelyn* will



## That Literature



understand what I mean. When Charles Dickens wrote his *David Copperfield* he told more of himself than is told in Forster's three volumes of biography, and yet even he failed to make his hero vivid and interesting. Sir Walter Scott, who in one sense was the most open and in another sense the most reticent of men, could do nothing with Francis Osbaldistone, though he allotted to him the great prize of Di Vernon. Still the aphorism of Coleridge, that a man of genius is a man of deep feeling, holds good, and so every fragment of autobiography from the elect, even when it is not meant seriously, is apt to be true and memorable. For myself, I often turn to Charles Lamb's little sketch of himself, and find more in it than in Canon Ainger, or Mr. Procter, or Mr. Fitzgerald, or Thomas Westwood. Take such touches as these: "Can remember few specialities in his life except that he once caught a swallow flying." "Stammers abominably, and is therefore more apt to discharge his occasional conversation in a quaint aphorism or a poor quibble than in set or edifying speeches: has consequently been libelled with aiming at wit, which, as he told





## *is* Autobiography



a dull fellow that charged him with it, is at least as good at aiming at dulness." "Crude they are, I grant you—a sort of unlicked incondite things—villainously pranked in an affected array of antique modes and phrases. They had not been his if they had not been other than such: and better it is that a writer should be natural in a self-pleasing quaintness than to affect a naturalness (so-called) that should be strange to him." Still more authentic and memorable things about Lamb will be found where he professed to speak for other people. And so I am inclined to think it is almost everywhere. A writer may appear to be studiously impersonal, and yet be personal nearly all the way through, or personal at least in special passages. It will be found, I think, that these passages of personality are the living part of his work, giving him his power and influence, impressing themselves upon the minds of readers, and defying the assaults of time. Occasionally a biography will give us the key to much from which we have been barred out, or, to change the figure, will throw a flood of light upon what has been obscure. Even if we never



have that key, when we come upon something that strangely moves us, we may be sure as a rule that the words and thoughts have been passed through the fires of life. I might even say that in the most ephemeral forms of writing, such as journalism, what is most interesting is what has been part of the writer's experience. I have just been reading a review of Mark Pattison's life of Casaubon, by Mrs. Oliphant. As an expert criticism it is ludicrous. Mrs. Oliphant was no scholar, and she had no sympathy with scholarship, while Mark Pattison was a true scholar. But when she remarks on Pattison's treatment of Casaubon's domestic arrangements you see at once that she is much wiser than Pattison, and if you have read her autobiography you recognise that she is talking about things she has gone through.

Another distinction must be made. There are two lives—the life of actuality and the life of imagination and dream. In many cases the dream life is more real than the other. Sometimes the soul goes back and lives in the dismantled homes and the long vanished gardens. More often it goes forward, and has its home



## *is* Autobiography



in the life that might have been, that came once so near to being. We can often, if we read wisely, find out what came true in dream, what was so dear and so cherished that the dull grey world of fact was as nothing in comparison. And in speaking about autobiography we comprehend the two existences and accord them equal rights. Thus it is the fashion to say that Charlotte Brontë drew from her own experiences, and the commentators try to find a basis in her life for every incident described in her works. They are wrong in one sense, and right in another. Charlotte Brontë's life is written out in her work with a rare frankness and fulness, but it is rather her life in imagination than her life in fact. This is as it should have been, for few and sombre were the outward incidents of her days on earth. It was when her spirit took wings that she lived, and lived grandly. I have no space to prove and illustrate my statement. Let one fact suffice meanwhile. If any one has written a story of love in lines of living fire, it is Charlotte Brontë. Yet, do we find it in her life? If any one recognised the sacred obligations of family ties, and suffered



## *That Literature*



on their account, it was Charlotte Brontë. Her life was a living sacrifice to her sisters, and especially to her father. Has there ever been any woman of her age and position who submitted so meekly to have her marriage put off and nearly made impossible by an unreasonable old father? She lived the life of humble duty, but that was not her true life. That life was in the world of love. Her heroines, let me note, are all of them quite free from family obligations. Jane Eyre, and Shirley, and Lucy Snowe, and the sweetest and dearest of them all, Frances Evans Henri, may have aunts, but they are, so far as I can remember, without father or mother, without brother or sister. They are free to live the life of love, to say, "All for love, and the world well lost," and to fulfil the words. Can we doubt that this was Charlotte Brontë's dream of life, a dream that did not translate itself into what we call actual reality, but a dream so vivid that, in comparison, reality was faint and dim?

Let me give almost at random a few illustrations out of the many which immediately fill the mind when this subject comes up. Let us



## *is* Autobiography



take fiction. I fully grant that for fiction of the first class the gift of story-telling is an absolute necessity. Nothing will make up for the want of it. In this field humour, and passion, and observation, and learning have exhausted themselves in vain, because they were unaided by the story-teller's special talent, the talent for making a plot, for creating an overpowering interest in the narrative. For success, a novelist must be able to cover and surround the reader with the story. Unless he can do this, everything seems to slip through the reader's fingers, and the book is merely a quarry from which people may steal with comparative impunity. And yet the mere art of story-telling is not enough. It may win immense temporary popularity, but it does not confer immortality. In all the immortal books there are what some one calls touches of blood and of the Old Night, revelations of the inner secrets and the last experiences of the soul. Without the personal element no work of fiction is vital. This is equally true in poetry. I do not believe that any command of language or matter will win the unwithering leaf. Nor will any process of



## *That Literature*



imitation or assimilation make up for the want of soul. The bard is a maker ; by which I do not mean that he is a creator, but that he works with the materials that his own heart gives him. Hackneyed enough, but eternally true, is the line Mrs. Browning loved to quote, the true *Ars Poetica* :

“Fool,” said my Muse to me, “look in thine heart  
and write.”

That is why so many clever and delightful volumes of poetry are bound to perish. They may please one very much. I am not ashamed to say that I can repeat many pages of Owen Meredith, but I know, all the same, that Owen Meredith has written nothing at first hand, and that he is dead already.

The same thing must apply very specially in preaching. The preacher should not in one sense talk about himself. I knew and revered one old minister, who never used the first personal pronoun in the pulpit. And, of course, there are necessary qualifications for preaching which great preachers cannot be without. A great preacher should have certain physical



qualities. He should be an orator, he should have magnetic power. Many men have had all these, and have attracted great crowds, and left nothing to be read. No true revelation had been given to their souls. They had never entered into communion with God. They were no nearer than Asoka, who said to the priests at the Buddhist Council of Nice, "What has been said by Buddha, that alone was well said." But Mr. Myers, in his wonderful poem, "St. Paul," caught the true idea that without an inward disclosure to the heart there is no religion, and that if this disclosure is given no argument can ever shake its certainty.

Lo ! if some pen should write upon your rafter,  
    *Mene* and *mene* in the folds of flame ;  
Think you could any memories thereafter  
    Wholly retrace the couplet as it came ?

Whoso has felt the Spirit of the Highest  
    Cannot confound, nor doubt Him, nor deny ;  
Yea, with one voice, oh ! world, though thou deniest,  
    Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

I cannot help adding that one feels this must be so in true art, though I know nothing about painting. The great artist must have seen in

## 🍷 Literature *is* Autobiography 🍷

---

his soul that which he makes immortal. You have known a man or woman who has developed certain qualities, and the qualities are inseparably associated with them. When these qualities appear in some figure of the past of which no authentic image exists, you wish you had the power to reproduce your idea. The autobiography of J. K. Hunter, a book apparently forgotten, but full of matter, contains this saying, "I remarked that had I been painting a Judas, I would have selected a thin-lipped, smiling, silly-like, nice man." Such was the Judas whom Hunter knew.



### III

## *The Art of Conversation*

I ONCE went, for journalistic purposes, to a well-known palmist. Among other things he said to me, "You have no social gifts whatever. You are not adapted for society." Lifting up his hands and making expressive gestures, he went on, "You have nothing to say, not one word." Taking compassion, I daresay, on my mortified and fallen countenance, he went on, "But when you are talking to a friend you speak well, very well indeed." I repeated this observation to some of my friends, expecting—never mind what. They were evidently much impressed with the profound truth of the palmist's observations—or, I should say, of his first observation, for on the second nobody said anything—so much impressed that some of them at once made up their minds to visit the discerning man.

## *The Art of Conversation*

---

From this it may be thought that the art of conversation is the last subject I should write on ; but there is an ancient sage saying that a man may not be a cook, and yet may know very well whether or not a dinner is well cooked. Who was it that declared that he surpassed most people in his faculty of explaining exactly how a thing ought to be done, though he could never do it himself? I think I know a good conversation when I hear it, and so let us compare notes about the subject. In the first place, a good conversationalist is not the same thing as a good talker. Sometimes very eminent men can talk most brilliantly, though they cannot converse. This is the case especially when they live in the country, and do not see too many people. Lesser men are very well content to listen, and to drink in the wisdom that flows from their illuminated minds. It is less easy to bear when the man is not very eminent. Everybody knows people who talk and talk, who might as well be stone deaf for all the attention they pay to any remarks of yours. These persons are usually enormous egotists, and they are never really liked. When you make your

## *The Art of Conversation*

---

modest remark after listening to a quarter of an hour's speech, and find that, without taking the slightest notice of it, your companion begins another oration, your hand does mysteriously move to the poker. I ought to say that there are very great men who listen as well as they can speak, and they are naturally very much loved and admired. Of these the most prominent example in recent times was, perhaps, Robert Browning. It must be owned that most of us, when we get on a subject which we think we know, are apt to say too much, and it might be wise for us to think, after a conversation, of how much share we have taken in it. As a rule we should listen more than we speak.

But when we speak about conversation it is another thing. Dr. Johnson, in the *Rambler*, says that the art of conversation is the only accomplishment which there are continual opportunities of exerting, and deficiency in it can always be remarked. When he speaks he is thinking about the man who talks in a large company, and whose entrance immediately raises everybody's spirits; the man whose departure is like the setting of the sun. Dr. Johnson has not

## ♣ *The Art of Conversation* ♣

---

a very great opinion of these people, though he admires their gifts. He tells of one who was for fifteen years the darling of a club, because every night precisely at eleven he began his favourite song, and during the vocal performance, by corresponding motions of his hand chalked out a giant on the wall. Another endeared himself to a long succession of acquaintances by sitting among them with his wig reversed. Another was popular because he contrived to smut the nose of any stranger who was to be initiated in the club. Another could purr like a cat, and then pretend to be frightened ; and another could yelp like a hound, and call to the waiters to drive out the dog. There are, however, those who, by the sheer gaiety of their spirit and their radiant good-heartedness, are everywhere welcome, and make a dull dinner party something very different from what it would have been without them. These men are the benefactors of society, and it is a pity that they are so few.

I am thinking, however, of the best kind of conversation, the conversation between two people ; what the Scotch call a twa-handed crack.

## *The Art of Conversation*

---

This is almost the culmination of human happiness when it is at its best. Two are company, three are none. It happens seldom that really enjoyable conversation takes place between three people. One of the three is always more or less out of it, and the two others lose their pleasure by benevolent efforts to draw him in. I have heard very enjoyable conversation at very small dinner parties, where the table was round, and there could be a general interchange of ideas. Still, this kind of talk, even at its best, is not like the talk of two congenial spirits. Let us think what are the constituents of this particular enjoyment.

Perhaps one is that the two should be friends. They need not necessarily be intimate friends, but there should be a feeling of sympathy between them. There should be the basis of a common affection. Without these there is not the reciprocal interest in one another's affairs which is necessary. Each should be interested in the joys and sorrows, in the failures and successes of the other. One should be able to talk to his friend without feeling that his friend is bored, and the sympathy that he receives he

## *The Art of Conversation*

---

should be able to give back in full measure. Then it is a great advantage if the two are working in the same line. It need not be identically the same, but it should be partially the same. Once more, the two should be fairly on a level. The sense of inequality ought not to come in disturbingly. One man may be superior to the other in some respects, but he should not be superior in every respect. Again, there ought to be that perfect frankness which is based upon firm mutual confidence. Conversation is ruined if you have the least suspicion that your companion, meaning to do no harm, will repeat your chance, half-meant observations.

Of what will the talk consist? Necessarily to some extent of personal experience. This is not only permissible, but delightful, on the condition of mutual sympathy. I have known three very clever people who could talk very well on almost any subject, and would do so, but who never became interested until they began to talk about themselves, their books, and their children. I have even known some who made no pretence of interest in the listener's affairs, who never asked any question about the



## *The Art of Conversation*



home life, who never alluded to anything their friend might be working at. They to themselves were all in all. But most men want to share things, and if you have a friend with whom you can share equally, all I can say is, do not lightly lose that friend.

Another element in good conversation is that each should have news. That is why it is well that friends should be engaged in the same kind of work. We all love news, and we like it all the better when it does not come to us from the newspaper, or when it comes before the newspaper gets it. Those who have not much brilliancy in expression, who have no great command of words, should cultivate news, be able to tell in a kindly way what they see and hear. Everybody likes a man who tells him something that he did not know and is glad to know.

Dr. Johnson says that no conversation is more extensively acceptable than the narrative. "He who has stored his memory with slight anecdotes, private incidents, and personal peculiarities seldom fails to find his audience favourable." I think Dr. Johnson means pretty much what I have

## *The Art of Conversation*

---

been trying to say, but one must pause on this word anecdote. The late Dr. Dale once said to me that he thought nothing killed conversation so much as anecdotes. One man tells a story, another man feels bound to cap it, and so the thing goes on till the streams are lost in the desert. There is immense truth in this. I knew a man who, when he went to a dinner party, studied beforehand the last number of *Tit-Bits*, and made mysterious notes by which he contrived to recall and repeat the stories. He was justly considered an intolerable bore. It takes a great deal of skill to tell an anecdote acceptably, and in such a way that your companion does not feel himself challenged to tell another, but smiles and passes on. Another thing which gives me great pleasure is to compare notes upon some book that has been recently read or some public question that is being discussed. For my part, I care nothing at all about difference of opinion, provided it is not fierce and intolerant. On the contrary, I rather like to have things put before me in another light, and some of my closest friends are in almost every opinion entirely opposed to



## *The Art of Conversation*

---

me. But, as Carlyle wisely said, "Except in opinion we do not disagree."

It does not always happen, perhaps does not often happen, that the conversation deepens before its end. When it does happen, when you feel that the discussion is perforce closed at the most interesting time, and that you could have gone on for hours, then you have been greatly enriched. As a rule, I think you cannot have the best kind of conversation with the same man oftener than once a week. Nobody can really talk well for any length of time whose mind is not full, and who is not always replenishing it. It is wonderful and pathetic to see how many fine minds live upon the past, say the same things over and over again, and become inaccessible to new ideas and new facts. None of us, I am afraid, can escape repeating. Our few stories will recur, do what we please. But it is a very good rule to talk out of the week's reading and experience and thought as much as possible. A great journalist once told me that he kept up the freshness of his articles by trying to use for them chiefly the books he had just read. That would not

## *The Art of Conversation*

---

be possible for every one, but it indicates a direction in which it is wise to move. Many people would be much better talkers if they could even slightly enlarge their vocabulary. Studied talk never interests; you must be interested yourself before you can interest any one, but an attentive reading of good books will help us to be less monotonous in our phrases and adjectives. If any one desires to be brilliant in conversation, he is apt to make an end of conversation. As Dr. Johnson wisely says, "The wit whose vivacity condemns slower tongues to silence; the scholar whose knowledge allows no man to fancy that he instructs; the critic who suffers no fallacy to pass undetected; and the reasoner who condemns the idle to thought and the negligent to attention, are generally praised and feared, revered and avoided."

To conclude, multitudes have to go through life, without ever tasting the real pleasures of conversation. They never, somehow, find congenial friends. That is often the great drawback of living in the country. You meet pleasant people, and can speak with them up to a certain point, but you never are able to express

## ❧ *The Art of Conversation* ❧

---

your real mind. Many men go through life practically condemned to silence as to all that is deepest in them. They may not feel the want, and indeed, as a rule, people get to acquiesce in their circumstances. It is a want nevertheless, and the American suggestion, that conversation ought to be carefully taught as an art in schools and colleges, I believe to be a wise one. If we had a rational system of education, then we could talk ; we could have our pleasant evenings unplagued with Scotch ballads, and recitations, and the mandoline.

#### IV

### *On the Art of taking Things coolly*

MY subject may be illustrated by two or three anecdotes collected from an essayist of long ago. An Irish squire, when his house was attacked, admitted his assailants one by one through the partially open door, and killed each of them with a knife whenever the threshold was passed. An old nobleman was assailed on Hounslow Heath by a highwayman, who clapped a pistol to his lordship's breast, and cried, "I have you now, my lord, after all your boasts no single man should rob you." "Nor should he now," said the gentleman, "but for that fellow peeping over your shoulder." The highwayman turned, and his lordship blew his brains out. On the other side take two stories. Late on a winter's night a clergyman heard a tap at the window shutter. Excited by the recollection of a recent burglary and murder, he seized a



## *On taking Things coolly*



pistol, rushed to the front door, flung it open, fired into the darkness, bolted his door, and returned to his family, little thinking that he had killed his housemaid's sweetheart. An agitated old bachelor in a retired country residence heard a noise in his garden. He sallied forth, took one pistol himself, and gave another to his parlourmaid. "Mary, I go this way, you go that, and mind you shoot the first man you meet." The first man Mary met was the old bachelor, and the old bachelor was shot. But the most wonderful story of coolness I have ever heard was that of Mrs. Burdock, who was hanged at the beginning of the century at Bristol for murdering an old lady. Mrs. Burdock was proceeding to the place of execution outside her prison, followed by the usual procession of a clergyman, sheriff, and other officers. Suddenly the procession came to a pause. What was the matter? Rain had begun to fall, and Mrs. Burdock resolutely declined to move an inch without an umbrella. So clergyman, hangman, sheriff, and all were kept waiting till one of the party ran to the governor's house, to borrow the umbrella which was to shield Mrs. Burdock



from the storm for the remaining few minutes of her existence.

Some men take their work coolly, and others do not. The contrast is between two types. To visit one man and observe his ways leads you to think that he can be doing very little. He has, apparently, plenty of leisure, does not seem burdened by his task, does not talk about it, is not particularly tidy in his habits, and even seems glad of an excuse to escape from the routine of his existence. Another man is as noisy as a steam-engine. He has everything in perfect order, as neat as a new pin. He tells you that he does not know how he is to get through the multitude of his occupations. He tells you that he can spare you five minutes, taking out a watch, and unwilling to avert his gaze from it. You will almost certainly find that the quiet man is the man who gets through most work. You can hardly believe it, talking to him, but it is forced upon you by the results. In fact, fussiness is a great hindrance in the way of doing much. The energy that ought to be concentrated in putting things through is wasted in steam, and through sheer flurry



## *taking Things coolly*



and excitement the work is spoilt. I believe in method. I also believe in every man being allowed to choose his own method. It is of no importance, comparatively, whether a man rises late or early, what his hours are, how he arranges his office. What is important is that he should have in his mind a clear plan for each of his days, and stick to that plan. To stick to the plan is everything. To resist distractions and temptations, to set the force of the will upon the accomplishment of the day's programme whatever may allure, is to succeed in doing much. A man who takes things coolly will be able to do as a rule all that he wants to do, and yet have plenty of leisure time. It is difficult to understand why people complain of want of time, though it is easy to see that they may often mourn over the want of strength. A man with physical and mental vigour steadily directed to one object will never find the days too short.

It is interesting and sometimes painful to see how men take sudden success. The ordinary success, where a man through many years climbs the ladder one step at a time, and hardly realises



that he is getting on, is not the success that intoxicates. When you have to look down the ladder and count up the number of steps between you and your start, in order to convince yourself that you have ascended at all, you are not likely to be overmuch excited. What you will probably think of are the extraordinary difficulties of the progress. But, in these days especially, it is by no means uncommon for a man to spring at a bound from obscurity to fame. There is an inevitable flutter of the heart, an inevitable change of feeling. No one should be blamed on account of it. Still, the suddenly successful ought, above most men, to take their success calmly. Some of them have their heads turned and show it. Others have their heads turned and try not to show it. Perhaps the head may be turned in spite of oneself, but every effort should be made to conceal the catastrophe. The dangerous period is in the beginning. When the successful man sees that he holds his success only as a challenge cup, that his prominence inevitably provokes envy and detraction, that a slip is hailed by an envious multitude, and that at any time some rival may wrest away his prize, he is not in great danger ;





## *taking Things coolly*



but it takes time, apparently, for the flush of triumph to subside, for the clearing and the calming of the mind. That time is very critical. It is the time when a man should carefully watch himself. Let him remember how soon his fame may subside, how unsubstantial its foundations may be, and let him walk humbly amongst his less fortunate, though perhaps equally well deserving, fellow-creatures. There are many physicians who will gratuitously endeavour to cure the disease of swelled-headedness, but I am afraid they go about their business very roughly.

A much more frequent occurrence is that of sudden failure; and there, too, the prescription "Take things coolly" is in place. Some have made a certain provision against failure, and have so often contemplated it that when it comes they are not greatly disturbed. I will not speak here of the religious peace which is the true fortress of the soul. But not a few in my own line of life, though I am afraid they are decidedly in a minority, have a constant feeling that the sun which is shining upon them now will one day very suddenly set. So they are living well within their incomes, and making ready for the dark-



ness and the rain. It is wonderful that the majority take a different course, and entangle their whole lives by living up to or beyond their incomes, and getting into debt. It is all the more wonderful when it is considered how they injure the fortunes of those who should be dear to them. How much of the quiet happiness of the world depends on the careful thrift of self-denying men and women who have passed to their rest ! Provident people are like performers who have a net spread under them, and who know that if the worst comes to the worst they will fall into a safe place. And I know a few who would not be sorry, who would take the failure as a release from toil which they do not feel free to abandon. But supposing the worst comes to the worst, supposing that heavy disaster suddenly falls, is it not wise in that case to say as little as possible, to measure the disaster as truly as it can be measured, not magnifying it, and still less minimising it ? Honestly confront it, honestly recognise all that it means in the present, and must mean in the future. Then, when that is done, set about repairing it with a brave and trustful heart. Don't be frightened by words like



## *taking Things coolly*



“irreparable,” “irretrievable,” “hopeless,” and the like. We know well enough that after certain blows it can never be quite with us as it was before them. Yet duty is duty, and if it be done faithfully, it will turn into joy, and life will again become worth living, and compensations, real even if modest, will come for what has been taken from us. At no point of his life should a man despair. At any point of his life, for what he can tell, the best of his days may be before him.

It is a curious fact that men and women who bear themselves calmly and bravely in great trials are nervous and fussy about small matters. This perhaps cannot be helped. It is a great achievement to be cool if you have to look after a quantity of luggage, more particularly if you are on the Continent, and possess that strange but very common knowledge of foreign languages, which consists in being able to read them with perfect fluency and intelligence, while you can neither speak nor understand one word of them. It is not easy to be calm, however frantically you are told to be calm. I knew an old gentleman who had small experience of railways, and was firmly convinced that the time-tables were



not adhered to. He thought, not only that the trains might start later than the advertised time, but that they might start earlier, and made it a rule on every journey to be at the station at least an hour in advance. I know another man who, after much fussing with luggage and many losses, has reached comparative calmness by making up his mind, and convincing his household that he does very well if he brings two-thirds of his possessions home again. As an old traveller, I rather think that the fussiness and flurry at railway stations is diminishing. You do not so often now see the look of savage impatience, hear the voice of querulous despair, witness the prodigious bustle, the temporary frenzy, the bewilderment and agony of pater-familias walking up the platform, watch in hand, and occasionally kicking a favourite dog. I think the art of taking things coolly on the Continent is decidedly more common than it used to be. It is just as well. There is a story of an English tourist who, one evening in Naples, was hastily jostled by a stranger in a narrow road. He put his hand into his pocket and missed his watch. Knowing the reputation



of the people, he fancied he was robbed, rushed after the supposed thief, knocked him down, and severely beat him. The unfortunate man handed out the article demanded, and the Englishman went triumphantly back to his hotel. When he got into his bedroom there was his watch peaceably ticking on the mantelpiece. He perceived that he had himself acted the part of a highwayman, and it may be presumed took a precipitate departure from Naples. An English lady travelling in America with a quantity of luggage, felt her pocket picked of her bunch of keys and luggage checks by a man seated beside her. The man was the only person in the carriage besides herself, and she was afraid to say anything till the train reached its destination. Then, when the railway guard put his head into the carriage and asked to see the luggage checks, she quietly pointed to her companion and said, "That gentleman has my checks." The man was wholly taken aback. He delivered the checks, and the lady's luggage was saved.

It should be superfluous to advise coolness in case of attack. The angry controversialist usually loses his case. It may be necessary sometimes

## ❧ *On taking Things coolly* ❧

---

to strike hard, and to strike home, but this should be done after full deliberation. What many angry people are apt to forget is the power of silence. There is, after all, a strong instinct of fair play among our people, though one is sometimes tempted to doubt it. A man is violently attacked, and the attack is persisted in day after day. If he makes a weak and angry reply, judgment goes against him. If on the other hand he maintains silence, the public is ready to suppose that he has something to say if he cared to say it. Of course, there are attacks that must be answered, and answered at once ; but where one combatant is furious and the other cool, the lookers-on are very apt to suppose that the man who keeps his temper is right, even though he is not.

## V

### Vanity *and* Its Mortifications

I SHALL not attempt to distinguish between vanity, pride, and conceit. Vanity primarily means emptiness. It was in this sense that Dr. Johnson used it when he wrote about the vanity of human wishes, and I suppose that the emptiness in which vanity consists is emptiness of the better wisdom. Its place is occupied in a vain nature by a senseless interest and complacency in one's own self.

I think, however, that there is a true distinction between two forms of vanity. One kind of vanity is the vanity of people who are so perfectly satisfied with themselves, that they never imagine that other people can fail to admire them and give them credit for every good quality. This quiet, stolid vanity is most common amongst people who have never had to put themselves to a real test, who are born

## ♣ Vanity *and* Its Mortifications ♣

---

in comfortable circumstances, who are good-natured and surrounded by good-natured people, who are adequate to the extremely small part they have to play, and who become duller and more blunted in faculty as life goes on. Perhaps, on the whole, men and women of this type enjoy as little interruption to happiness as any in the world. Should a great call be made upon them, or a startling change take place in their circumstances, they are apt to be most miserable. But to be thoroughly convinced that whatever you do is right, that you are everything that can be wished from a personal and social point of view, and that you are loved and esteemed by all who have the happiness of knowing you, that you need to do nothing to vindicate your own self-estimate, that nobody ever names you except to praise you—this must be in its way a very satisfying condition of mind, and it is far more common than some writers suppose. A sound, dull, thick-skinned vanity gets through the storms of life as little disturbed as a pet animal in a good house, and gets through in much the same way.

But the kind of vanity with which all of us



## ☞ Vanity *and* Its Mortifications ☞

---

are familiar is not the vanity that is sufficient for itself, but the vanity that needs to be continually fed. The first form of vanity implies much dulness of faculty. The second, on the other hand, frequently goes with great brightness. Essentially, however, the two are the same; but the first assumes admiration, the other wants to be sure of it, to have it continually in evidence. The vain man of this sort, like the dull man of the other sort, turns everything round to self, but he has to fight the harder battle because he has wit enough to know that everybody does not admire him, or, in other words, everybody does not know what a gifted being he is. It has been said that vain persons want the possession of eye and ear—possession of eye, perhaps, more than ear, as the form of notice easiest to realise and most full of intoxicating ingredients. Rousseau had undoubtedly elements of unworldliness in his character, and it ought not to be forgotten that, when London was eager to see him, he would not go out one night because his dog howled. But when he did go out to see Garrick act, and the house was crowded because it was known he was to

## ❖ Vanity *and* Its Mortifications ❖

---

be there, he was intoxicated with vanity, so much so that good Mrs. Garrick, who sat by him, was made very uncomfortable. The philosopher was so anxious to oblige the public with a full vision of himself that he hung so far forward over the front of the box, that Mrs. Garrick was obliged to hold him by the skirt of his coat, lest he might fall into the pit. It need not be denied that vanity of this kind has done the world much good. It has prompted men to do more than they would otherwise have accomplished. Nelson was known to be particularly susceptible to public recognition and praise; and the great Napoleon was as much hurt as Oliver Goldsmith when he found that the eyes of the company were directed not to him but to a beautiful woman. Some of the greatest men are not vain. Scott was not vain, Dr. Johnson was not vain, Shakespeare was not vain. I doubt whether it could be said of Thackeray that he was vain. Dickens, it must be admitted, was egregiously vain, and when he unwillingly recognised that the glorious freshness of his work had departed he was driven into other ways of delighting the public and receiving their applause.

## ☙ Vanity *and* Its Mortifications ☙

---

One bad effect of the vanity that is always most displayed is that it tempts people to make adventures in which they come to grief. Goldsmith might have rested very well on his fame as a writer, but he was determined to shine as a talker, and though he said bright things now and then, it is impossible to resist the contemporary testimony to his failure. But the most pathetic, as it is the most common result of vanity, is more to be witnessed amongst women than amongst men. It is pitiful to think that many are vain of their dress. A woman who dresses well according to her means only does her duty, but beauty when unadorned is adorned the most, and a bedizened old woman is a sad sight. A real loveliness of form and feature may match itself in simple attire against all the resources of art and science and splendour, and yet easily win the day. The woman who hopes to be permanently admired on account of her clothes, and who does not cultivate the graces of heart and mind, has before her the dreariest of possible futures.

To form a fairly true estimate of one's own capacities is not vanity. It does not unduly

## ❧ *Vanity and Its Mortifications* ❧

---

exhilarate, for the reason that, if a man knows what he can do, he equally knows what he cannot do. I should be inclined to say that even a very slight self-complacency is not a bad thing. It is just as well that a man should think more highly of his house, of the view from his window, of his own sanctum, than his visitors do. It helps to make him content, cheerful, benignant. I do not admire parents who are unable to perceive special virtues and merits in their own children. After all, one has to live with oneself. A morbid and exaggerated depreciation of self makes a man miserable and is the cause of misery. It is also apt to make him useless in the world. He hides his talent in a napkin, and there is no worse sin than that. But this kind of humorous self-recognition, which has always half a smile in it, is usually checked by the discipline of life, by the experiences that sadden us and the laws that rule us, and is rarely allowed to become offensive. Shyness is often a form of vanity, and yet it is not the faculty I have been describing. It is usually the affliction of young people. They know that they are not so foolish as they look, that if they had the chance they could do some-

## ☛ Vanity *and* Its Mortifications ☛

---

thing, and they know also that they have no immediate means of making their real selves recognisable. Usually this trouble wears off. They come to see that the world goes on, the sun rises and sets, even if they do make a stupid mistake in etiquette, or say something extremely silly. They learn as they grow older that their seniors regard the young with a vague feeling of goodwill, and with very little more; that they make excuses for awkwardness readily enough, and that they wait to see what the opportunities and tests of life will bring out. Sometimes, however, a strange streak of shyness lingers to the last where you would least expect it. It is told of Grattan, a fearless and even truculent fighter, if ever there was one, that he was so overpowered with shyness when his health was proposed and kind things were said of him, that he could not manage to put two sentences together. I think it is Mark Rutherford who remarks that journalists who write in a dogmatic and even ferocious and bloodthirsty manner are often in private life all that is diffident and tender.

What are the great evils of vanity? First, its almost inevitable mortification. The first kind of

## ♣ Vanity *and* Its Mortifications ♣

---

vanity I have described—empty self-complacency—may quite possibly escape mortification. Its danger is when it takes the commendation of friends too seriously, and ventures out into the open. I know of a lady who was fond of writing verses. They were circulated among her friends and acquaintances, and passed from hand to hand and enthusiastically praised. The enthusiasm at last reached such a height that it was determined to publish them. It was a little disconcerting to find that no eager publisher was willing to offer terms, and that the book had to be issued at the expense of the fair writer's husband. However, even in remote parts of the country the stupidity and wickedness of editors, literary advisers and publishers is by this time fully recognised. But the book came out, and attained considerable eminence as a collection of unintentionally amusing doggerel. The reviewers took some notice of it, seeing their opportunity for extracts. I believe the authoress suffered intensely, but I do not believe that her own estimate of her gift was really changed. It is so easy to construct an explanation. You have heard of the student who went forth from his native parish to triumph in

## ♣ Vanity *and* Its Mortifications ♣

---

the University. He came back without prizes, and there was a little bewilderment at first. It gradually leaked out, however, that the professors had a spite at him. I have known one or two cases where vain people of this kind, young men especially, had to work for their living, and in one instance at any rate the man was saved because the teaching did not begin too late. But for the vacuously vain any change in their self-estimate would so completely alter their world that they would become quite useless, helpless, and miserable. So perhaps they are best left alone. But the others suffer continually. Minute wounds are being perpetually inflicted on their self-love, and sometimes the wounds are deep, A man without a skin, or with a very thin skin, has a hard time of it in this world. He cannot conceal his sensitiveness, and so his enemies have him at their mercy. This is particularly the case in literature. The great critic knows how to commend but almost anybody can get together a few bitter and brutal phrases. Happily editors are less willing to print them than they used to be.

The worst punishment of vanity, however, is

## ♣ Vanity *and* Its Mortifications ♣

---

that vain people find the schooling of life so very hard. The victims of an empty vanity cannot bear to learn, because they conceive that they have already learned everything. They are quite insensible to hints, and the wisdom of life is to know how to catch up hints and make the best of them. Since they will not hear the whisper, they hear at last the thunder, and the experience is not pleasant. But I doubt whether, as a rule, they can be taught anything. The mind reverts, in spite of all humiliations, to its old complacent attitude. On the other hand, clever people who are vain take all correction amiss. The very first condition of learning is humility. It is because they are humble that children learn so fast. They are not ashamed of their ignorance: they know that they are ignorant and that they want information. They put questions and remember the answers: they use their eyes and their ears. If they are set right they test the matter as well as they can, and cheerfully accept the fact that they were wrong. If we carry that spirit all through life we shall greatly succeed in the true sense of the word. We shall understand how almost every book and almost every human



## ☛ Vanity *and* Its Mortifications ☛

---

being can teach us something. We shall use our faculties, such as they are, constantly in the quest for knowledge, and so the mind will be enriched and the capacities expanded, and a dewy freshness will still lie on life even when the last night falls.

## VI

### *Some Questions about Holidays*

THE first question to ask about holidays is whether they are necessary at all. Many people get on amazingly without them. I heard the other day of an old lady who has a small business in Marylebone and never leaves it. She was asked by a customer whether she did not sometimes wish to get away. The reply was that she had seen so much trouble and fuss about holidays, and had observed so often that they did harm instead of good, that she was quite satisfied with her situation. The immortal Tim Linkinwater did very well in London, and would not leave it for any consideration.

“I’m neither going to sleep in the fresh air ; no, nor I’m not going into the country either. A pretty thing at this time of day, certainly. Pho ! It’s forty-four year,” said Tim, making a calculation in the air with his pen, and drawing

## ♣ Questions *about* Holidays ♣

---

an imaginary line before he cast it up, "forty-four year next May since I first kept the books of Cheeryble Brothers. I've opened the safe every morning all that time (Sundays excepted) as the clock struck nine, and gone over the house every night at half-past ten (except on Foreign Post nights, and then twenty minutes before twelve) to see the doors fastened and the fires out. I've never slept out of the back attic one single night. There's the same mignonette box in the middle of the window, and the same four flower-pots, two on each side, that I brought with me when I first came. There ain't—I've said it again and again, and I'll maintain it—there ain't such a square as this in the world. I *know* there ain't," said Tim with sudden energy, and looking sternly about him. "Not one. For business or pleasure, in summer time or winter—I don't care which—there's nothing like it. There's not such a spring in England as the pump under the archway. There's not such a view in England as the view out of my window. I've seen it every morning before I shaved, and I ought to know something about it. I have slept in that room," added Tim, sinking his voice a little, "for four



## *Some Questions*



and forty year ; and if it wasn't inconvenient, and didn't interfere with business, I should request leave to die there."

When one thinks of the uncomfortableness of many holidays, of the disappointments in the weather, of the ineligible acquaintances made, of family resentments caused by overcrowding, of the defects of some lodgings and of some landladies, it may be seen that there was something to be said for Tim Linkinwater's choice. I knew an old minister who never during his life of eighty years took a holiday, though he sometimes went away for brief visits to his relations. He used to say, "When I take a holiday, I take it at home," and so he did. He slackened his work as much as possible, and gave his time to the pursuits that pleased him. But I am afraid the race of non-holiday-makers is now nearly extinct. Carlyle and his wife were very fond of quoting the advice once given to them : "Vary the schane" (scene); and brain-workers know that there is need of this. In another atmosphere, and with other surroundings, things gradually assume their true proportions. We see that we have disquieted ourselves in vain. We see that



## *about* Holidays



there is more pleasure in our lives than we had thought. The mind recovers itself and begins to act aright, and when we come back again the effect of the holiday is to send us gaily through months of work which might otherwise have become burdensome. In occupations which do not require any tension of the brain, people may go on very well without any holiday at all, but when the faculties are strained, it is perhaps wise now and then to have a pause. And yet many of us get our holidays with so much difficulty, with so much preparation before and so much extra work after, that we would be willing to surrender them if only our associates were willing to. But the associates are never willing, and so the question may be held as settled.

How long will a good worker be willing to rest? How long will rest do him any good? I am, it will be observed, speaking only of workers, for those who do not work can never have a holiday in the proper sense, and can never know the full glory and delight of rest. In giving an answer to this question several things must be taken into account. I have known very hard-working men who took as much as three



months' holiday. But then during their holidays they were not idle. They were, it may be, preparing for work by reading and studying as much as they could, by meditating in the sweet summer air. If you can do this you may lawfully extend your holiday. In Scotland Professors, as I have frequently said, have holidays about eight months of the year—a standing proof that even the Scotch are as yet inaccessible to reason on certain points. What a Professor does with his holiday I have never been able even remotely to guess. There are legends to the effect that they prepare lectures during these months. It may be so. I hope it is so. But for ordinary drudges I rather think that a sufficient holiday is a month in the year, with as many little supplementary absences as are practicable. I never had more than a month any year in my life except once. The exception was a trip to America. It was not exactly a holiday, but it was a delightful experience. But, taking ordinary years, the brain-worker must be very much exhausted, or he must be getting weary of his labour, if within a month the old impulse to be about his business



does not seize him. If he uses the month well and wisely, he should find it carry him over four months of hard and unbroken toil. I am not speaking to the unhappy people who hate their work, and to whom every release from it is a restoration to liberty. There are many such people, and in multitudes of cases they are not to blame. They have suffered from that saddest of disasters, the being yoked to a life-work which they do not love, for which they have no fitness, and in which they are always more or less miserable. If you cannot get a month, a fortnight will do a great deal for you. Some of the hardest workers I know manage well by taking three fortnights a year. They are happy in their holidays; but I think on the whole they are more happy in their labour.

What kind of holiday does most good? I think, certainly not the holiday you enjoy most, but the dull holiday. I have greatly delighted in foreign trips, moving from one city to another, viewing the sights and taking long railway journeys. I have also had foreign holidays when I had a great deal of congenial society.



## *Some Questions*



These, however, have not yielded me much physical benefit. As a rule I have found myself exhausted when I began work, with no spring of physical or mental energy. The holidays that have done me good are brief holidays, such as I have had sometimes in the Riviera, in places where I knew nobody, and had next to no conversation, but was content simply to be outside, steeping myself in the sun and going to bed at ten o'clock. Even in the Riviera, which, whatever people may say, is one of the loveliest places in the world, I have grown weary of the incessant sunshine and the tideless sea, and the lazy, weary people with their hands "red with the blood of murdered time." And yet I have found on my return that I could work with redoubled vigour, that I did not rebel, that I wakened each day happy to think of what had to be gone through. A holiday in a country village in Scotland, spent in lounging about, varied by occasional drives, is most profitable, if only the weather is good. If it rains and rains, one may become depressed.

There is another question on which something





## *about* Holidays



may be said. Is it possible to enjoy a holiday if you are alone? There are friends of mine who think that it is not, that you must have a companion. At the last moment it may happen that the companion fails them, and then they are discontented, and go on muddling their holiday. In many respects a companion is an advantage. Robert Louis Stevenson has told us in one of his early books what a complete world two congenial friends make for themselves in the midst of a foreign population. All the hum and stir of life goes on, and these two strangers exchange glances and are filled with an infinite content. In order, however, to be happy with a companion you must have one who is thoroughly congenial and sympathetic, who understands your unspoken thought, who above all is willing to let you have your way on the concession of the same privilege. I shall never forget a holiday I once had with a man of whom I had thought well. In a couple of days I discovered that he was a reincarnation of Mr. Barlow of *Sandford and Merton*. He was an early riser, and would come into my room and waken me. One



## *Some Questions*



should never be awakened on a holiday. He would rouse me and read out of a time-table or out of Baedeker. He would say: "If you get up directly there is just time for us to have breakfast and catch a train for such and such a place." Now it is obvious that on holidays there should be ample leisure for breakfast. Nobody should ever dream of starting by any train before eleven o'clock in the morning. Nobody should take a watch with him on his holidays. He should as far as possible experience the timeless state. If he wants to go anywhere he should, when the impulse seizes him, ask a waiter when the next train starts for his place, and take it if it is suitable, and wait till next day if it is not. A good plan, which I have tried more than once with eminent success, is simply, when you feel disposed, to drive to the station and wait until there is a train for the place you want to go to. Mr. Barlow also was great upon seeing all the sights in Baedeker, and all the pictures that were marked with stars. I will not, however, go on with this sad story. People may travel together with comfort if they will not criticise one



another, and if each will allow the other to do exactly as he pleases.

But I am afraid there are not many of such people, and so I am inclined to agree with Hazlitt in his delicious essay, entitled "On Going a Journey." It begins: "One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to go by myself." "The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty to think, feel, do, just as one pleases." "Give me a clear blue sky over my head and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours' march to dinner—and then to thinking!" One subject which he would allow that it was pleasant to talk about on a journey was "what one shall have for supper when we get back to our inn at night." "How fine it is to enter some old town, walled and turreted, just at the approach of nightfall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom; and then, after enquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to 'take one's ease at one's inn!'" Hazlitt thought that the pyramids were too mighty for any single con-

## ❖ Questions *about* Holidays ❖

---

temptation. One needs instant fellowship and support in presence of them. "Yet I did not feel this want or craving very pressing once, when I first set my foot on the laughing shores of France. Calais was peopled with novelty and delight. The confused, busy murmur of the place was like oil and wine poured into my ears; nor did the mariners' hymn, which was sung from the top of an old crazy vessel in the harbour, as the sun went down, send an alien sound into my soul. I only breathed the air of general humanity. I walked over 'the vine-covered hills and gay regions of France,' erect and satisfied." Never less alone than when alone! Wise and pregnant also are the words of the great critic: "Those who wish to forget painful thoughts do well to absent themselves for a while from the ties and objects that recall them, but we can be said only to fulfil our destiny in the place that gave us birth."

## VII

### “*When Three Stars came out*”

SOME four years ago I visited the hill town of Litchfield in Connecticut. The scenery that surrounds it is picturesque, and in some ways recalls Scotland more than any other part of America I remember. But the associations of the town with the Beecher family are a permanent interest and attraction. Litchfield has been long a famous place, and round about it there have clustered as residents some of the most brilliant people in the United States. Mrs. Beecher Stowe tells us of having been repeatedly visited when in Paris by an aged French gentleman, Count ———, who in his youth, when his family was exiled in the first Revolution, had been placed there to be educated for the Bar. Though on his return to France he had moved in the highest circles, he dwelt in his conversation with Mrs. Stowe with enthusiasm on the society of



## “*When* Three Stars



Litchfield, which he pronounced to be the most charming in the world. The traditions of that old society are well maintained, and yet somehow the residents seem strangely unappreciative of the Beechers. In fact, America is not nearly enthusiastic enough about her choicest spirits, though I know that there is a strong impression to the contrary. I heard at Litchfield about the Indians who had their favourite fishing and hunting-ground in the lake streams and forests in the district. I heard about the proud associations of its inhabitants with the War of Independence, but nobody seemed to know that Mrs. Beecher Stowe had written about the place, both in the life of her father and in some of her most tender and beautiful stories. The site of the old Beecher homestead is still pointed out, but the building has vanished, and the church where Lyman Beecher, the father of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher, ministered has been replaced by a more pretentious building. I should like to have found the place where Henry Ward Beecher, then a little child, dug for his dead mother. He was too small to go to her funeral, and



was told by some of the family that she had gone to heaven, and by others that she had been laid in the ground. Putting the two things together, he resolved to dig through the ground and go to heaven to find her. Being discovered one morning under his sister Catherine's window, digging with great zeal and earnestness, she called to know what he was doing. He lifted his curly head with great simplicity and answered, "Why, I am going to heaven to find mother." Many such beautiful stories are told of the place, but I have room for but one other. Lyman Beecher's family observed the Sabbath in the New England fashion; that is, it lasted from Saturday night to Sunday night. On Sunday night the children were allowed to begin playing "when three stars came out." I am going to draw a moral from this permission. It is this. We should begin to be happy as soon as we can, not waiting for a great noon-tide, not waiting even for a heaven crowded with stars. Let us make the most of the little we have, be happy as soon, as much, and as long as possible. Let us begin to play when three stars come out.



I have been struck by the curious listlessness of many people in these days. They do not enjoy life as they ought to do. They do not care about things sufficiently. It is not as if they had much to trouble them. Their health is fairly good. They are not particularly troubled about money. They have not experienced any great disaster, and yet somehow they have lost their hold upon life. You cannot interest them deeply. There is no subject on which they talk with real eagerness and interest. They do not put their whole souls into their work. When leisure comes to them they rest, but they cannot play. See them travelling, and you cannot help observing how weary the whole business of sight-seeing is to them. Watch the languid way in which they take up a newspaper or a book. They are bored and *blasé*. In many cases this is partly the result of overwork, but often it comes from doing too little, from a prolonged inaction, which at last becomes wearisome, but out of which escape seems impossible. How refreshing it is to see an old man full of vitality, anxious to be at his newspaper in the morning, hurrying to the station





for his evening sheet, thirsting for information about new books, new movements, new men! Jowett may not have been all that his pupils thought him, but I like him for saying that the last ten years of life are the best. His reasons may not be so good as the affirmation which he bases upon them. He says "best, because you are freest from care, freest from illusion, and fullest of experience." And no doubt there is something in Leslie Stephen's comment that among the illusions that vanish there is sometimes the illusion that anything which you did at your best had any real value, or that anything which you can do hereafter will even reach the moderate standard of the old work. Better and healthier is the text from which Oliver Wendell Holmes preached for some sixty years. Youth, said he, is "something in the soul which has no more to do with the colour of the hair than the vein of gold in a rock has to do with the grass a thousand feet above it."

I grant that in the happiest lives men of any depth must have their periods of deep depression, and even of bitter sorrow. No life



## “*When* Three Stars



serener and grander than that of Tennyson has been lately lived among us, but we know that he went through a period of great trial and despondency. Like the man he was, he kept his feelings largely to himself, and took his troubles bravely, and at last won his victory. I know that hearts may be quite broken by some sudden and terrible blow, and I know that the long continued pressure of anxiety and care will at last permanently depress the energies of the spirit. Yet I cannot agree that the Obermanns and the Amiels are wholly admirable persons, with their persistent, lingering, weary melancholy. The part of the wise is to meet trouble with all one's own strength, and all the strength one may receive, to welcome alleviations, to look out for the light, to hail and prize the first ray, and count it a promise and earnest of the noon. It is wise to begin play when three stars come out, perhaps sooner even.

We miss our way in life unless we know the difference between work and play, unless we know how to work and how to play. Some people can work very hard, but they cannot play. Others can play, but they cannot work.



The life that is all work or all play is sure to be a failure. Perhaps Horace Bushnell put the distinction between work and play as well as any one. Work is activity for an end ; play is activity as an end. Work is what we do by a conscious effort of will. The stronger the effort is, the harder is the work. But play has its spring in some fund of life back of the will, and the more exuberant that is, the more joyous is the play. And so what is work to one man is play to another. What is play to one is work to his neighbour. There is no need that people should be of one mind in such matters. What is really important is to understand that we cannot live on work, that we must have our play, that the savour will pass out of the years if we toil too long without interruption. And hardly less important is the fact that there is no spring of inspiration deep enough to keep us long contented and eager if we go on playing and have no serious purpose of toil and achievement. It is pathetic to think how so many people work to get rid of work, drudge to-day in the hope of play to-morrow, till at last they are incapable of



## “*When* Three Stars



play, and find that the hardly tolerable routine of labour is the only thing that keeps life from being intolerable.

And this brings us to the lesson that our play is not to be put off too long. The passion for money, which may become at last the most sordid and contemptible of all, is often respectable enough in the beginning. It is a desire to be free at last from the necessity of drudging, free at last from the irksome labour and the mean economies and the stinted generosity which we are forced to practise now. Men say to themselves that when they have amassed a certain sum the noon will be upon them, and they go on despising the starlight and the dawn till at last they have obtained their early ambition ; and, behold, they are baulked of light. So they go on hoping and hoping for the sunlight that never comes, working through the darkening hours, till the heart contracts and narrows, till it is incapable of all the highest happiness. There is everything to be said for an honest and punctual, faithful toil, but the play must go along with it. When three stars appear, or even one, we must pause to enjoy their light.



What sources of true happiness we have all neglected! We see it now that the lights are gone out, and will not shine down upon us any more. What sources of a true pleasure are with us yet, if we had but the wisdom to rest and enjoy their radiance! We press on foolishly and blindly, thinking that the days to come will bring brighter lustres with them. But they may not. I have spoken of the listlessness of many people who are well off and successful. Let me testify also to the wonderful courage and patience of the great multitude who have little light in their life, but know how to make the best of that light. I know men who hold their situations by the slenderest thread, whose work is burdensome, whose salaries are small, who have troubles to meet them when they come home. But they have had the wisdom not to think over-anxiously of the future, and to fasten their eyes on the few bright spots in the present. And they are happy and even buoyant. Surely theirs is the true wisdom. It is they who rebuke most impressively the sullenness, the ingratitude, the discontent with which many good gifts of God are received.



## “*When Three Stars*”



I have read that one of the greatest sources of moral disorder is an exorbitant thirst for happiness. It is true we must not expect from life more than life can give. Nor should it be forgotten that it is very hard to distinguish between starlight and sunlight. Many a man waits for the sunlight to let his heart go free, and when it comes in a victory more complete than he dared to dream of, he looks back and finds that the starlight that he let pass thanklessly was far better. On this I will quote a lovely parable, which will go home to the hearts of all who understand. It is a song of starlight and sunlight by one who had passed through both, and, looking back, knew that the first was the rarest and the dearest.

I came into the City and none knew me ;  
None came forth, none shouted “He is here !”  
Not a hand with laurel would bestrew me  
All the way by which I drew anear ;  
Night my banner, and my herald Fear.

But I knew where one so long had waited  
In the low room at the stairway’s height—  
Trembling lest my foot should be belated,  
Singing, sighing for the long hours’ flight  
Towards the moment of our dear delight.



*came out."*



---

I came into the City when you hailed me  
Saviour, and again your chosen Lord :  
Not one guessing what it was that failed me,  
While along the way as they adored  
Thousands, thousands, shouted in accord.

But through all the joy I knew—I only—  
How the refuge of my heart lay dead and cold,  
Silent of its music and how lonely !  
Never, though you crown me with your gold,  
Shall I find that little chamber as of old !

## VIII

### Midnight Tea

THERE were four of us round a dinner table one Thursday evening. Our kind hostess had arranged her guests as in a restaurant. The four were two celebrated lady novelists, one gentleman novelist, and your correspondent. We will call the ladies Miss A. and Miss B., and the gentleman Mr. C. The conversation turned, as it often does in these days, on the question whether people are on the whole happy or unhappy. Miss A. resolutely argued that unhappiness was the rule. She said that, if you watched a number of travellers coming out of a railway train, the question was settled for ever. Their general aspect was one of unmistakable discontent and weariness. Mr. C. took up the opposite side. He maintained that life was full of small comforts which were all the time making for happiness, and that we did not





## Midnight Tea



sufficiently appreciate them. For instance, it was a happiness to waken in the morning and look back on a night of sound sleep. It was a great happiness to have a cup of tea, not too strong, and yet not weak—a nice, refreshing, homely liquor, not the pale, straw-coloured infusion of Lady Dedlock, nor the washerwoman's rasping bohea. Then there came the newspaper, with something to interest and to talk about. A kind or encouraging word in speech, or in writing, or in print, revived the heart. A good book, old or new, need never be wanting. There were for many domestic solaces, and others deprived of these were not less happy in their friendships, friendships usually more intimate and unreserved than in the case of those whose first thoughts and feelings were claimed by those who belonged to them. Miss B. expressed her agreement with this view of the case, but Miss A. was unconvinced. At last Miss A. declared that she believed that the great reason why people were not happy was because they had lost the power of falling in love. The chief happiness of life was that of two people who were essential to one another, and who



## Midnight Tea



had all the delight they needed, and almost all they were capable of, so long as they were in one another's company. Miss B. was of opinion that people fell in love as quickly and as deeply as in any previous period. Mr. C. thought that young people were much more considerate and balancing than they used to be. A young man with a small income may be a member of a good club, and have every comfort of the rich man at small cost, including that of having his letters brought to him on a silver salver. He might be inclined to fall in love with a penniless girl, but checked himself in the thought of the deprivations that would fall to him and to her if they were united. In the same way a girl might be without fortune, and yet brought up in every luxury by parents who were in the habit of spending every penny of their income. She had no schooling to fit her for the experiences of poverty, and therefore she preferred to remain as she was rather than risk a change. In this way vehement impulses were restrained, and marriage, when it did take place, was based upon something more than love, even if love entered. Miss A. acquiesced



## Midnight Tea



in this, though she would have gone further, and declared her belief that, though people might be fairly well contented in such judicious and arranged unions, they were not true marriages, and left those who entered into them without the best happiness of which their natures were capable, and compelled to seek all the time unsatisfactory substitutes.

I thought of Charlotte Brontë, and her theory of life, which will, perhaps, be found more clearly expounded in *The Professor* than in any other of her books. She began with an intense craving for happiness, and she had to face the fact that there were many for whom happiness, or the materials for happiness in a high form, are apparently beyond reach. They are plain, they are poor, they have no high connections, they are not very well educated. They have nothing about them specially winning or attractive. Are they to conclude, then, that for them life must be grey and deprived of its highest satisfactions? She refused to acquiesce. Her theory was that every woman, however plain; every man, however unfortunate; if they had the power of being true to them-



## Midnight Tea



selves, had somewhere a fitting mate, some one who would see beauty where others saw ugliness, who would find wisdom where others discovered nothing but commonplace, who, in a word, would give heart for heart. Supposing these two found one another. The only question that remained was a question of ways and means. That she admitted might be difficult, but if both did their best it was not insoluble. To the faithful and the conscientious, inspired and gladdened by one another's company, nothing should be impossible. Charlotte Brontë was not, I think, much of a believer in the delights of work. Work, to her, meant drudgery. What she liked to think was that, by strict frugality, enough money might be saved to allow of a comparatively early retirement from toil, and a long afternoon and evening spent in blissful content.

All agreed that the chief antagonist of happiness was bitter and almost unremitting physical pain. Three of us also maintained that many lives were blighted by a great desolation of the affections, though on this point Miss A. dissented. She did not believe that in this age the affections



## Midnight Tea



were so strong as to be incurably wounded by any loss.

After coming home I began to think of our conversation, and especially of pain as an antagonist to happiness, and I remembered an essay written twenty years ago by a great sufferer, with the strange title which I have borrowed to-day, "Midnight Tea." The essayist confessed that this title was practically a misnomer. She was thinking of two, three, or four in the morning. She suffered from one of those forms of illness which eat the sweet kernel out of sleep, and whose particular pride it is to make the small hours hideous. These maladies know the time like a chronometer, and in the small hours they hold high carnival. But at intervals they have mercy, and seem to depart. Well, then, there are two friends, let us say, or a man and wife, or a mother and daughter, who pass the night together in order that one of the two who suffers may receive the help which only one hand can give. The immediate pain suddenly ceases. Then springs up a sudden thought out of the new, sweet peace: "Let us have a cup of tea." It can be managed at once. The tea is forthcoming, the spoons



## Midnight Tea



tinkle in the cups, the sweet incense goes up, and there is for a time calm and cheer, a soothed feeling, a quiet triumph in human resources, a genial gleam of light in the long tract of the dark hours. There may be no conversation, save that highest form of conversation which passes between two who, through the love and intimacy of long years, understand what each is thinking, and interchange ideas without words. Sometimes there is a pleasant distraction from the first noises of the day outside, or perhaps the furniture creaks, which is pleasant when there are two to hear it, or some object that has been with you in the room for years reveals a something you had always missed. A woman's portrait will show you another light in the eyes, another curve in the lips, some fresh touch of stateliness or of charm. It is altogether like an oasis, and it is good to look back upon when the burning desert has been traversed. There is hardly any such tie between human beings as "Do you remember?" and "Do you remember when we had midnight tea?" brings back many softening, hopeful thoughts. All this is written for those who will understand.

I read over again lately the *Life and Letters of*



## Midnight Tea



*F. W. Robertson*, and came to the conclusion that the happiest period of his life was the time when he was fairly laid aside from work, suffering very much, and with the prospect of death before him. That was, I have no doubt, because he had got rid of his heavy responsibilities. The men and women I pity most are those who, in spite of physical weakness and even torture, are obliged to go on working day after day, that they may keep the wolf from the door. Even this condition, however, has its own alleviation for those who are humble enough and wise enough to seek them. But after much knowledge of chronic sufferers, I believe they are not unhappy if their natures are sweet, and sound, and unselfish, and I believe much of their happiness lies in the fact, that they are no longer urged and tormented by their own consciences to do this and to do that. We need not be very sorry for the old woman in the workhouse, who greatly desired a message of God's will for her, and could hear nothing but this : " Lie still and cough."

## IX

### Firing out *the* Fools

I AM no pessimist, but I want to "do without opium," and to keep my eyes open to whatever may pass, be it bright or dark. As to one thing we are all agreed. The whole forces of the world are being steadily brought to bear on our strongholds. Whatever we hold we hold as a challenge cup is held. We are in a new century and a new world, and the stress of competition comes upon us from every side. It follows that our quiet and easy ways of doing business must end. We may keep our ground; but we can only keep it if we are willing to work as our competitors work. Even so we may find it hard enough. But any other course makes straight for national death. Efficiency must be our motto in all things.

Are we efficient? Most certainly not. Does any one who knows anything about business





## Firing out *the* Fools



imagine that the business of this country is being well managed everywhere? So far is this from being the case, that business men are always telling me that, in their own trades, there is much shortcoming. There is a slow advance perhaps ; a little reluctant waking up ; a grumbling admission that things might be done better and more briskly and more economically. But few comparatively are willing to face the whole problem ; to throw their forces with concentration and steady perseverance into the effort. A business man, who employs more than a thousand people, told me the other day that he could only count on three or four as in every way satisfactory and trustworthy. The vast majority desired to get as much money as possible for as little work as possible. They had no interest whatever in the fortunes of the business with which they were connected, and no concern for its prosperity. Employers, too, are frequently wedded to old ways, resent changes, are exasperated if they have to put more energy into their work. I know a firm of five partners, and only one of them has the least driving force, or the least foresight. Our newspapers may scream and



## Firing out *the* Fools



rave, but they produce little effect. Employers are sullen. Workers, so long as they can get work or wages, are quite indifferent.

Under these circumstances, it may be worth while to consider the American policy of to-day, "Fire out the fools, and pay good men handsomely." It looks a little merciless; but I am inclined to think that, in the end, it is the kindest and wisest policy.

"Fire out the fools." In every business establishment there are many who are not worth their wages. Either they were never efficient, or they have ceased to be efficient. This is so all over the world. It is the case even in the United States. I read the other day a bright little article in an American paper, in which the writer spoke of youths who despised their business, youths who took no pains to master it, who were always anxious for a half-holiday or a whole holiday, youths who were clever in games and learned in sport, but stupid and incapable in the task they were set to do. The writer said very properly, that these had to be got rid of, and that as soon as possible. There are also, as everybody knows, men who are



## Firing out *the* Fools



efficient when young, but who have grown easy and comfortable, and much attached to bygone ways. They are always to be found amongst the champions of reaction. When the firm with which they are connected strikes out in some new enterprise, they shake their heads. They not only fail to help it on to success, but they are a drag upon it. If it fails, they say, "I told you so," or what is even more irritating, perhaps the most irritating phrase in the world, "I always thought so." You never dream of communicating to them any new idea. Ignorant of the fact that it is only by new and sound ideas, properly carried out, that business can live or thrive, they have made up their minds before they hear the proposal that the proposal is bound to collapse. If, in spite of them, any new project is made to succeed, they say as little about it as they conveniently can. Yet they are respectable men in their way, keep their hours, do their work in a decent sort of way, are eminently well pleased with themselves, and would imagine that they were wronged exceedingly if they were fired out. In fact, they calculate upon being kept in the business



## Firing out *the* Fools



as long as they can work, and then being dismissed with good pensions. It seems hard to fire them out, and yet in the end it might be the best thing for them. If every man was made to know that he held his position simply so long as he filled it efficiently, there would be a great quickening everywhere. As it is, many men become duffers at forty. And there is too much to be said for the idea that youth is the qualification for success. But, as a matter of fact, it is not so. It is of no importance whether a man's hair is white or black, whether he was born in the fifties or the sixties or the seventies. What is important is that he should be efficient. If a man keeps up to the mark of the time, never allowing himself to fall asleep or to become comatose, he ought to grow a better man with the years, for he has the experience of the old and the alertness and readiness of the young. As it is nowadays, so many elderly people have nothing but experience, that they are quite useless; for experience, after all, can only do a little, and that little depends on its being wisely used. Experienced men are apt to apply their experience to the conditions under which it was



## Firing out *the* Fools



gained. But now that the conditions have all altered, this is plainly fallacious and destroying. The new conditions must be recognised, and then it will be seen that what would have been successful under old conditions will now prove an entire failure. We have plenty of room for old men like Earl Roberts, and he is not the only one. Still, the chance of the old is to associate themselves with the young. The caution and experience of age, joined to the enterprise and audacity of youth, are the conditions of success. It is long ago since one of the first men in the City of London said to me that he regarded no firm as safe if the partners were all over forty years of age, and I fully believe he was right. By the end of this century there will be no such thing as appointments for life. People will keep their places just as long as they deserve to keep them, and not a minute longer. As things are, we have every kind of abuse. We have in our colleges professors who teach nothing, who have no influence over their students, and who live to abnormal ages simply because they have never known what it is to work. And



so, as I said, we have in almost every business establishment men who exist in the business for no useful end; who draw their money, but fail to do their duty.

The next item of the American advice is equally sound, and follows upon the other. "Pay good men handsomely." If you fire out the fools you can afford to do this, for a good man in any business is worth an incompetent man many times over. For one thing, he can do much more work. He will avail himself of all the labour-saving appliances with which modern science has furnished us. It is a mistake to suppose that discoveries lessen labour. They come just when the pressure of work is growing intolerable, and make work possible. For example, the system of typewriting did not arrive a moment too soon. Business men were becoming crushed with the weight of their correspondence. The use of typewriting is practically a test of an up-to-date firm. If a man comes down to his business and laboriously writes his letters, he can practically do nothing else. He could save one half the time by dictating them to an expert typist, and then the other half of



## Firing out *the* Fools



his time would be given to other work, and things would move forward. In the same way there are editors, or used to be editors, who practically knew nothing of what their rivals were doing. They could not be troubled. They fancied that they knew their business, and that everything was right. For such people there are rude and strange awakenings, and there will be more of them in the future. I knew a journalist who went to a certain city to be the first editor of an evening newspaper. A rival had planted itself pretty firmly. This man not only did his work as well as he could, but when the work was over took a blue pencil, spread out his own sheet and the rival sheet, and found out what was common to each, what was distinctive in each, what were the strong points of his rival, and what were his own weak points. He set himself to developing his own features and to meeting his competitor on the points where it excelled him. This meant very hard work, but it meant success. Even one man of great talent and unwearied diligence and devotion will make a mighty difference to a business, will alter its outlook, and will to a



## Firing out *the* Fools



certain extent carry a large body of dull and vacant men upon his shoulders. But it is possible to crush him. Even in these days, a firm where every partner was thoroughly efficient and where every one of the principal workers was also thoroughly efficient, would carry all before it. Is there such a firm to be found in all London? It is plain that it could only be made up by some painful experiments. Until we are taught our lesson it is not likely we shall try it. When we do try it, it may be too late.

I fully sympathise with trades unions, and regard the organisation of labour as one of the best guarantees for peace and prosperity in the country. But upon one point I would fight some labour representatives to the death. Let me quote from a smart new magazine, published in America, and entitled *The World's Work*: "The American working man demands good wages and limited hours, but he takes a personal pride in doing as much work as he can, and in acquiring greater skill to increase his output. The British workman has come to take the opposite view, and to pride himself on doing





## Firing out *the* Fools



the least he can for a good wage. Nearly all the British unions limit the amount of work a man shall do, and impose a fine for exceeding it. Under such a proceeding the cost of production is fixed, and fixed by the unions. There is no elasticity. This rigidity and the cost of labour, together with the unions' unwillingness to use improved machinery, has kept English capital from enlarging old plants or building new ones to meet increasing demands and the new conditions of trade." How far this is the truth I do not know, but it is the truth to some extent. Nothing could be more fatal than the attempt to crush exceptional ability, and to reduce all to a dead level of mediocrity at a time when in competing countries exceptional ability is encouraged to the uttermost. The effect in cases I have personally known is altogether disastrous. I could mention instances where trade has gone to the United States, which might well have been kept in London, simply because the trades union insisted on the dismissal of men who turned out more than the prescribed amount of work. What we need to-day is to give ability its full reward, and



## Firing out *the* Fools



this will help to produce more intimate relations between employers and workers; in fact, they will be, as they ought to be, on an equal footing. No business can really prosper where there is not constant communication between all concerned in it, and the free interchange of ideas.

As the American writer I have quoted says, there is always plenty of room for high ability joined to entire devotion. Our businesses are thronged with mediocrities. A business man, when a mediocrity is introduced to him, can scarcely ever do anything for him. Nor is mere ability enough. Though a brain fertile in practical ideas is very rare and very valuable, there must be the power of patient, constant, watchful toil to realise those ideas. The young man who insists upon regular meals, whatever happens, and who during the last hour of his days is always looking at the clock, and who likes an afternoon off to see a cricket match at Lord's, is of no use in these days. He is as common as the rabbit in Australia—or is it in New Zealand?—and nearly as great a nuisance. But for those who have the quali-



## Firing out *the* Fools

---



fications and are willing to use them, for those who are daunted by no toil and no difficulty, for those who give themselves without reserve to the work they have in hand, there is always abundance of room.

## X

### “A Fellow *by the* Name *of* Rowan.”

I HAVE received so many letters about my recent epistle on “Firing out the Fools,” that I am compelled to return to the theme. Nor, to tell the truth, is much compulsion necessary. Any man whose lot it is to have continual applications for employment must have certain thoughts on the ways and manners of the candidates for work deeply burned into his mind. Without quoting letters in full, I shall single out for further exposition the main points suggested.

(1) Some correspondents imagine that I am writing in the interest of employers, and that I wish those who work under masters to have long hours and be content with little wages, so that businesses may be more profitable to their owners. On the contrary, I consider that many employers are just as incompetent, lazy, stupid,

## ❧ “A Fellow *named* Rowan.” ❧

---

and self-indulgent as the worst workman can be. They take no real pains, they do not keep a vigilant eye upon the details of their business, they neither recognise the good workman nor punish the bad workman. They are continually forgetting and muddling; they hate to be told that they are living in a new world and under new conditions, and they fondly imagine that what might have passed in periods comparatively stagnant will pass now. If the commercial prosperity of this country is lost, it will be quite as much the fault of employers as the fault of employees, and in both cases it will be a moral fault.

(2) Neither do I wish to see smaller wages or longer hours. I agree, in fact, with Mr. Keir Hardie, who says, in the *New Liberal Review*, that the true foundation for prosperity is short hours and high wages. But I agree with important qualifications. The short hours must be filled with toil, and the high wages must be earned by diligence, quickness, ability, and devotion. If a man puts his whole force into eight hours' labour he has done quite enough, and he has done far more than many people who labour twelve hours. You are not necessarily



## “A Fellow *by the*



working because you appear to be at work, because you are sitting at an office desk, let us say, and holding a pen in your hand, and discussing the last murder with some one in the room. You are working when you are putting the whole force of your nature into the thing you have in hand, and, if you are doing that, eight hours of it will suffice. As for high wages, every intelligent employer is more than glad to give them when they are earned. If you have a man in your establishment who really promotes the prosperity of your undertakings, who has valuable ideas, and efficiently carries them out, such a man will in no wise lose his reward. But if a man who dawdles twelve hours a day on small wages asks to be allowed to dawdle for eight hours and get high wages, he ought to be fired out. Whoever yields to him is on the quick descent to ruin and destruction.

(3) Some correspondents, professing to speak from the Christian point of view, denounce the competitive system of our day. One writer says: “May not the man who fires out the fools prove in the end to be a fool himself? If, for example we are employers of labour, but bent on producing



the best work, are we justified in dismissing a workman on the ground of incompetency, if that incompetency is his best service? Commercially and in the light of our competitive system we are, but surely there are other considerations." This shows that I need to explain what I mean by the word "fool." I do not mean an imbecile ; I mean a man who does not use his best faculties in the doing of his work, a man who shirks, or muddles, or idles. If a man is really an imbecile it is the duty of the State to take care of him. If, on the other hand, he has abilities and will not use them, he is a scoundrel, and ought to be punished. I think that is good Christianity. There was a certain teacher of old time who said that, if men would not work, neither should they eat. That is precisely my doctrine. On socialism I pass no opinion. What we have to face is the fact that we and all the world are more and more living under a competitive system, and that, until it is changed, we must make the best of it. Those who do not believe in it are justified in trying to alter it ; but while it goes on, no good will come of working it in a bad and slovenly way.



(4) Other correspondents ask why we should try to be first ; why people will not be content with moderate profits. The question, however, is not so much a question between large profits and moderate profits, as a question between moderate profits and no profits at all. If this realm of ours is to endure, capitalists must be able to make a fair profit in business. If they do not, they will simply invest their money. I do not profess to be an expert in commerce ; but I keep my eyes open, and I hear a good deal. Is it not true that the margin of profit in many of our industries is beginning to be very dangerously small, that a very little more, and the industries will be gone ? I want to know how working men are to profit if they take away this margin, with the result that works are closed and the workmen thrown out on the world. Nobody proposes that a capitalist shall be compelled to go on trading at a loss.

(5) One correspondent directly challenges what I said about the restriction of the output of work. He says emphatically that workmen never try to limit the amount of work that any of them can do in an hour. Well, I meet him with an





equally direct contradiction. I can quote specific instances where the men have gone to their employers, and threatened to strike if such and such a man was not prevented from doing what he was able and willing to do. I have known also two cases where the employers have yielded, and one case in which the expert workman has had to go. And, further, I have cases in my eye where the result was to transfer very considerable portions of trade that might have been British to America. But I will quote from a really great authority in Mr. W. H. Lever, who writes in the *New Liberal Review*. He says: "There is another danger that threatens us, and that is the action of trades unionism in favouring restriction of output. In the present century the most important question will be the creation of machinery for the cheap execution of good work." Mr. Lever also confirms me in saying that we have suffered from the disadvantage of low-priced labour, and that in England we must in future pay our workmen better, and the workman must make his services of more value. He says: "America with dear labour can and does to-day produce cheap boots and shoes, watches, and



many other articles, simply from the fact that the dear price of labour stimulated the manufacturers of these articles in the States to produce machines which would enable them to compete with the watches, etc., made with cheap labour in Europe.”

(6) There are some letters complaining that I speak of old age as a disqualification for efficient work. I think I gave full justice to old age when I said that efficiency was not a matter depending on the colour of the hair. Some old men, like Lord Roberts, are young, and hold their position simply by virtue of their qualifications. It is “old men with old souls,” to use Byron’s phrase, who are useless. Still, it must be admitted, and I hope I take the fact home to myself, that nearly all of us, as we grow older, become less open to new ideas and to new methods—more fossilised, less prescient. This should be resisted as far as possible ; but we need not flatter ourselves that we shall be at seventy what we were at forty or fifty. The older men can hold their ground only as they give ear to the younger men, and work with them, not jealously, but sympathetically. Experience, as I have said, is of value ; but if the



## Name of Rowan."



conditions change, it is of none. Experience of old conditions will teach you nothing as to what should be done under new conditions, and may indeed be very apt to mislead you. And so young men ought to recognise the drift of things, that drift being altogether against the old, and recognise that if they live, they will in time become old also, and just as incapable of understanding as their seniors are now. The moral is obvious. In future the period of great success, as a rule, will not be very prolonged. If a man does thirty years' good and successful work he may be well satisfied. What he ought to do in the period of his success is to live soberly, moderately, and quietly, to save as much as he possibly can ; then, when the time comes, as come it will, that his powers fail, he will have something to fall back upon. I have seen young men leap into a great success. Some of them have been wise enough to go on in the same modest establishment, and to make a comfortable and solid provision for the future. Others, again, as the income rose, have moved into larger houses, and forced an entrance into what is called a higher class of society. They have dropped their old friends, and their



new friends despise them, and speculate as to how long they will be able to go on. If prosperous young people are wise, they will not, unless compelled, go to live in more expensive houses. A great deal depends on the rent of a man's house. Their children will be none the worse, but all the better, for being brought up in a simple way, and in time, by the blessing of God, they will be able to face the future without fear.

(7) One correspondent says that, if the fools are fired out, they will have to be maintained in workhouses. No such thing. The very best and kindest way of treating a young fool is to fling him on the street. The contact with the pavement will waken him up when nothing else will. The boundless conceit and laziness of many young men in our day requires a treatment no less drastic than this. I am of opinion, besides, that if able-bodied people are to be maintained in workhouses, they should be compelled to earn their living. That the honest, hard-working tax-payer should have to provide money for the support of lazy louts is a monstrous thing. There is a great deal of mawkish sentimentalism about ; but the sternness of life is a primary fact, and cannot be evaded.



(8) I know that these remarks will be read with great impatience by many people. Older folk will say: "We have done very well in the old way, and we shall do very well still." The old way answered in the old time when competition was very little felt, especially the competition of foreign nations, and where people of one trade made it easy for one another. It will not do now; not at all. But it is to the young I address myself. They are going to find life much harder than their fathers found it, and the only chance for them is to do their very best. I have already said that the words that have done more harm than any others are "This will do." Young men who want to get on must never use them. They must always be able to say, "This is the best I could do." Next to them in mischief is the horrible phrase, "Oh, I forgot." The misery, the anger, the disappointment, the loss caused by forgetting, is unspeakable. You have no right to forget. If you cannot remember, you must keep a notebook. Mark in it every promise you make, and examine it from time to time. Again, when you undertake to do



a thing, you must find ways of doing it. Who of us does not know the young man who was told to do such and such a thing, and comes back at the end of the day with a variety of excellent reasons for failing to do it? So the day is wasted, the chance is lost. What you have got to do is to manage the thing somehow. A man goes to get some information about another man, and informs you, after a reasonable delay, that he took the journey and found the man out—as if it had not been his business to run the man to earth somehow! I have got two copies of an excellent little pamphlet, entitled “A Message to Garcia,” issued by Smith’s Printing and Publishing Agency. Every word of it is according to my own heart, and if I could I would put a copy into the hands of every young man in London. Briefly, the story is this: When war broke out between Spain and the United States, it was very necessary to communicate with Garcia, the leader of the insurgents, who was somewhere in the mountain fastnesses of Cuba. No mail or telegraph message could reach him. Nobody knew exactly where



## Name *of* Rowan."



he was, and yet he had to be found. Some one said to the President: "There's a fellow by the name of Rowan will find Garcia for you if anybody can." Rowan was sent for, and got the letter, started off at once, landed by night off the coast of Cuba from an open boat, disappeared into the jungle, and in three weeks came out on the other side of the island, having traversed a hostile country on foot, and delivered his letter to Garcia. McKinley gave Rowan a letter to be delivered to Garcia. Rowan took the letter, and did not ask: "Where is he at?" Now that is a man whose form should be cast in bronze, and the statue placed in every college of the land. This man was loyal to a trust, acted promptly, concentrated his energies, did the thing. What would the average man have done? What does he do as it is? He asks: "Where does he live? How am I to get through? What shall I do if he will not see me?" And after all those questions have been laboriously answered, he starts out, and comes back explaining entirely to his own satisfaction why he has failed. This book gives a little picture.

## ♣ “A Fellow *named* Rowan.” ♣

---

You are sitting in your office with six clerks within call. Summon any one, and make this request: “Please look in the encyclopædia, and make a brief memorandum for me concerning the life of Correggio.” Will the clerk quietly say: “Yes, sir,” and go and do the task? Certainly not. He will look at you out of a fishy eye, and ask one or more of the following questions: “Who was he? Which encyclopædia? Where is the encyclopædia? Was I hired for that? Don’t you mean Bismarck? Why should not Charlie do it? Is he dead? Is there any hurry? Shan’t I bring you the book and let you look it up yourself?” He will go off at last, and get another clerk to help him, and then come back and report that there is no such man mentioned in the encyclopædia, and it will turn out when you inquire that he has looked for Correggio under the letter ‘K.’

Yes, that is the true picture of the average type of man as I have found him; but there are “fellows by the name of Rowan” about, and they are the saving of their nation.



## XI

### *Taking Good Men into Confidence*

IN two previous letters I have expounded the American policy of firing out the fools, and paying good men well. There is a third article in the policy hardly less important than the others, and to this I propose to devote some attention. When you have fired out the fools and paid the right men rightly, you ought to take them into confidence.

In America I have been told on good authority that the gulf between employers and employed is far less wide than in this country, and from the little I have seen of American businesses I can well believe it. If an employer is sensible and up-to-date, and if he has a loyal, clever, and diligent staff, he will meet them on equal ground, and try to get all the help he can from their suggestions as to the maintenance and the



## *Taking Good Men*



extension of his business. Some employers in this country think that talking over things is a mere waste of time. They say that they prefer acting to talking. In my humble opinion no time is so well spent as the time spent in discussing business with capable and friendly helpers. In fact, if a man does not deserve to be consulted he ought not to be employed. The great and serious mistakes in any business are usually made because there has not been sufficient all-round discussion. Discussion, to be worth anything, must not be hurried. When one of the parties to a discussion is taking out his watch every five minutes, it is better he should go at once. To look upon a project in all the possible lights, to provide against the dangers, to take hold of all the chances, needs much thinking, and the thinking cannot all be done by one brain. There are men who are not worth consulting. They cannot teach because they cannot learn. I have known even young men whose brains seemed to be cast in iron. They had learnt one way of doing a thing, and they could not change it. They could not bring their minds into touch with



any new methods. They listened stolidly or with ill-concealed impatience to any hints that might be given to them. Hints had to be thrown into the form of commands before they were carried out. When it comes to that, mischief is close at hand, for an assistant does not really assist if he takes orders that he does not believe in and hardly understands. Such a man is not a man to carry the orders out. I would have free discussion between flexible, sensible men. Let each state his case to the other till one has convinced the other. Then there is room for satisfaction, then there is hope for success. If the difference is irreconcilable after a good talk, then I should say postpone a decision, let both parties think over the matter and resume the discussion, and it will turn out that the way is clear. In many businesses, I am afraid, there is no such thing as this kind of profitable thrashing out of subjects. Employers are distant. They give their orders, and expect to see them carried out. These orders would have been far wiser if they had been the result of conversation, and they would have been executed with far greater efficiency.



## *Taking Good Men*



Some employers, again, consider that any suggestion is little short of an insult. They take the "mind your own business" attitude, and the result is that nothing is said to them by men who care for their interests, and know that things are going wrong which might easily be put right. One great difference between the wise employer and the foolish {is the way in which each receives a new idea. The wise employer knows perfectly well that everything must begin with an idea. Unless ideas are brought into a business it must first become stationary, then go back, and at last collapse. So he receives every idea with respect and welcome, gives it the most earnest consideration, looks at it from every point of view, and never dismisses it until he is certain that it is impracticable. I know men in London who have made immense fortunes lately, and who might very well trust to their own brains for future developments. These men are the men who are always on the watch for ideas, who will give an audience to a man with no credentials, who will hear him out, and who will talk over his plan if it commends itself, and treat him



fairly. In fact, a man with ideas will, as a rule, be made far more welcome by a really great firm than by one which is small and diminishing. I have been present at conferences in American publishing houses, and have admired the frankness with which every one spoke. All were speaking on a level. Every thought thrown out was carefully discussed. There was welcome for each new project, and if on consideration the project was condemned, no offence was felt; in fact, the originator, after the talk, was sometimes the first to reject his own notion. Nobody but a fool would feel any offence because his idea was rejected. But the true cause of offence is not the rejection of an idea, but the rejection of it without careful consideration and discussion. It is of no use in these days to sit up aloft and to imagine that anything can be kept secret. As a matter of fact, I doubt very much whether there can be such a thing as secrecy in business establishments. In my view there ought to be no attempt at secrecy as between the principals and at least the chief assistants. There should be mutual confidence, mutual aid, mutual conference. What a strength



## *Taking Good Men*



it gives to the strongest man, if he has with him the thoughts, the energies, and the plans of competent fellow-workers ! It is in this way that leaks are stopped. It is in this way that the machinery is made to go smoothly and efficiently. It is in this way that the path of progress opens up, and the bugbear of competition ceases to terrify.

I will conclude with two counsels which deserve the careful attention of young workers. In the first place, in order to gain and keep confidence, you must show that you are worthy of it. In the office there may be the most unreserved frankness between fellow-labourers, but outside of it nothing ought to be said. You must learn to keep a secret. Depend upon it, if you fail in this you will be found out. Indiscretion in talking has done as much harm to young men as anything else in the world. The fact that you are trusted ought to make you trustworthy. In the second place, the more heart you put into your work the more joy you will get from it. Let it not be supposed that the happy worker is the worker who shirks his task. Your task will become hateful to you unless you



## *into* Confidence



can take an honest pride in it. When you are doing your utmost, putting all your force into the service, you are happy in that consciousness of duty well done which is one of the sweetest things on earth. Never mind whether you make much money or not. That is not the first thing. The first thing is to be true, to labour with a sweet, composed, invincible energy till you love your work and rejoice in your work. That, no doubt, is the true path to what people call success, but I should much rather say that it is in itself success. Some people write that success is not a thing after which Christians should strive. It all depends upon what you mean by the word. Christians are not to set their hearts on the miserable ambition to create a great fortune. That is often success in the world, but failure and death to the soul. But Christians are to aim day by day at the clean, conscientious, thorough fulfilment of the work appointed them. They are to aim at faithfulness, at punctual, critical, scrupulous virtue. Is there anything more to be prized than that? As a matter of fact, the world does prize it, but whether the world prizes it or not, it is still the duty of the

## ❧ Good Men *as* Confidants ❧

---

Christian, and the Christian ought not to be a worse man of business than the man who is not a Christian, but in the true sense a better man of business, giving nothing that is not his best, and working at all times in the eye of the great Taskmaster and Ruler.



## XII

### *The Sin of Over-Work*

THERE is such a sin as that of being over-busy. I do not think it is a very common form of transgression, but it undoubtedly exists. Its allurements are often such as tempt men of high character and motives, though sometimes they are sordid enough. But I do not mean to speak of those who make haste to be rich, who are fevered and consumed by avarice. I am speaking rather of those who wish to do what they can in this world, who are conscious that the time is short and shortening, and who desire that what remains of it should be turned to the best account. Such people need to be reminded that the half may be more than the whole, and that there is serious hazard of spoiling everything by over-eagerness, by reckless labour, and by the folly which refuses to recognise that there are



## *The Sin of Over-Work*



very strict and definite limits which no man may with impunity transgress.

Some men have pushed those limits very far away. No life fascinates me more than that of Leonardo da Vinci. I often gaze at the portrait of him prefixed to Mr. Hamerton's *Intellectual Life*. There was nothing almost that this wonderful man could not do. He was great alike in intellect, in feeling, and in physique. A sublime painter, he was also a sculptor, an architect, a musician, and a poet. In almost every department of science he threw out hypotheses and speculations, some of them wonderfully penetrating and prophetic. He was a first-class civil and military engineer. There was no personal accomplishment of which he was not a master. He excelled in dancing, in horsemanship, and especially in fencing, an art about which he was the first to write. He was so strong that he could bend a horseshoe double, and yet such delicacy went with his strength that his face is one of the most winning in the world. His nature was large, sympathetic, and disinterested. He used to buy caged birds that he might have the pleasure of giving them their liberty. Though calmly con-



## *The Sin of Over-Work*



fidest of his real powers, he was very humble, and at the close of his vast achievements he professed himself deeply dissatisfied with his own work. When, in his thirtieth year, he came to seek his fortune at Milan, he wrote a letter to the then reigning Duke, in which he said : "I can carry through every kind of work in sculpture in clay, marble, and bronze ; also in painting I can execute everything that can be demanded as well as any one whosoever." This was nothing more than the simple truth, and yet he had the yearning of all genius after something higher than it can ever attain, and in an epitaph written for him during his life by a friend of his, and apparently under his own inspiration, he styled himself, "The admirer of the ancients and their grateful disciple." He added : "One thing has been wanting to me—their science of proportions ; I have done what I could. Let posterity pardon me." To lead such a life as that of da Vinci, a union of physical, intellectual, and moral strength is needed such as may never come again in the history of mankind. But most people feel, even when they judge most humbly of their own powers, that by method, by diligence, by purpose, they might do



## *The Sin of Over-Work*



a great deal more than they have been doing. They also think that it is possible not to wither and decline as life goes on, but to subjugate new provinces year after year, to create fresh interests in life, that so the powers may not shrink and dwindle, but rather expand. In such thoughts and feelings there is certainly nothing dishonourable. But again, I say, that the wise man will bow to the fact of limitation, and will in this way do the best of which he is capable.

There is, to begin with, the fact that no man can do well more than a definite quantity of work. Work to be done well requires to be done at moderate speed. Sometimes a careful toiler will be astonished at the excellence of what he accomplishes quickly on a sudden call. But he will be most foolish to count upon this. It is no doubt correct to say that to some kinds of work overmuch care may be given, but generally speaking, the old criticism holds good: "This work would have been better if more pains had been given to it." So I say there is a work for each of us in life to which we should rise in the morning with our first fresh thoughts full of it, which we should



## *The Sin of Over-Work*



leave at night with our thoughts lingering around it, work which we love, and of which we are proud, and which we can own before men. There is a strict limit to our power of doing such work, and we shall do well to respect the limit. If we crowd in other tasks, everything becomes muddled and huddled. Life grows peaceless, without satisfaction, or comfort, or rest. Concentration is undoubtedly the rule for commonplace people if they are to succeed in this world.

It may be doubted whether we have a right to sacrifice life to the work of life. Life, it has been said, is not for working, neither is life for learning, but learning and working are for life. A man is so eager in pursuit of his toil that he practically sacrifices everything to it. He has no leisure. He scarcely knows his own children—at least, with any degree of intimacy. He has no time to trim the lamp of friendship. In the life of the great critic Ste. Beuve, we read that he surrendered everything to his work. No influence was allowed to interfere with the distinctness and truthfulness of his impressions. During a large part of his career he cultivated no intimacies. He even laid upon the altar all his early friendships.



## *The Sin of Over-Work*



His haunting dread was that he might have to part with his intellectual youth. The last period of his career was lonely and dark. He suffered from a hopeless and distressing disease, which he bore with the greatest calmness, continuing his critical writing to within a fortnight of his calamitous death. There was a great deal of kindness in his criticisms, though I do not forget such papers as that on Lamartine in the first volume of the *Causeries*. And yet perhaps he would have lived longer and would have been greater, if he had surrendered himself more freely to the claims of humanity. Admitting everything that can be said in his praise, his large and catholic judgment, his boundless curiosity, his determined attempt to purify his inner consciousness, it may well be argued that he would have been greater as a man and greater as a critic if he had been less hard, less impartial, more loving, and, if you insist upon the word, more foolish. The weakness of his personal attachments has already chilled his writing, even as it darkened his life. An excessive restlessness and activity prevents the best fruit of the mind from ripening. The great preacher must not be too much in



## *The Sin of Over-Work*



railway trains. He must not consider that a morning in his study is wasted if he has not been able to put a line upon paper. Quiet meditation will yield its result sooner or later to the patient. Let us not watch the clock too eagerly. I read with delight Thoreau's vindication of his days of reverie which his fellow-townsmen thought so idle. "My days," said he, "were not days of the week bearing the stamp of any heathen deity, *nor were they minced into hours and fretted by the ticking of a clock.*" And the best thing I know about Rousseau is that, when he was modestly provided for, he got rid of his watch, with the singular and joyful reflection that he would never again need to know what time it was.

There are people who cannot be condemned for doing too much at their business, but who allow the unpaid work done in the margin of their lives to engross them unduly. One of the most honourable and hopeful things to be noticed in London life is the way in which many hard-working City people devote themselves to religious work in the hard-earned leisure of their evenings. I know many who after days of stress and strife go cheerfully to philanthropic and religious



## *The Sin of Over-Work*



meetings. Some of the ablest business men of the day are serving the Churches in this fashion, and find their delight in doing it. With this nobody can find any fault, provided other claims are duly answered. But a phrase I once heard rings in my ears—"The man who was too busy to do his duty." It is no excuse for a business man that he serves his Church well, if he serves his employer ill. And here, too, there is a danger of letting the members of a household drift apart, a danger very real in the London life of busy and engrossed evenings. The first duties are to business and to home. The other duties, however sacred they may be, must come after. I have no patience with women who are too busy to do their duty, women who are great in philanthropic and social work, but who are too busy to look after their husbands and their children. The wife's kingdom must be the home, and her life is a failure and a mistake if the home is unhappy, no matter how much she does for liberty, for progress, even for Christianity. Charles Dickens never did better service than when he made this clear to the dullest, by such pictures as that of Mrs. Jellaby. We are wisest





## *The Sin of Over-Work*



and happiest, and tread most surely in the way of life, when we do well the work allotted to us, when we find time for the home, when we strengthen the ties that bind us to our friends. The place for us is, generally speaking, the place where we are. Miss Monflathers severely rebuked Little Nell for being a waxwork child. "Don't you feel how naughty it is," said Miss Monflathers, "to be a waxwork child, when you might have the proud consciousness of assisting to the extent of your infant powers the manufactures of your country; of improving your mind by the constant contemplation of the steam engine, and of earning a comfortable and independent subsistence of from 2s. 9d. to 3s. a week?" Good Charles Dickens did much to laugh this nonsense out of the world. Very few of us after a certain stage in life can change our place, and if we are miserable in the place, there is a probability, and more than a probability, that we have not done in it what we should have done, that we have not put heart and soul into that which had the first claim upon us. We may have been lazy, and that is far the likeliest thing, but there is just a chance that we may have been too busy to do our duty.

### XIII

## Samuel

TO prevent misapprehension, let me say at once that this letter is not an article rejected by the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. It refers to my Persian cat, Samuel, who has brightened our house now for about ten years.

Samuel came to us as a kitten from a village in Surrey. He is only half a Persian, but in my opinion half-Persians are the best of cats. They are often magnificently coloured—Samuel's rich black and yellow cannot be surpassed—and they have the inestimable advantage of being healthy and robust. He is a large cat, but there are larger, though I have never seen one more beautiful. I quite admit that his intellect is not remarkable. He is not, so to speak, an eminent cat, though, as will be seen, he sometimes gives us a surprise. That some cats do wonderful things is quite certain.



## Samuel



Sam Slick's cat was fond of the library, because there was a snug carpet there, and he used to wait for the library bell, follow the maid upstairs, and get in. I myself once had a cat in the country, which used to get in by climbing up to the latch of the kitchen door, and putting her paw upon it so that it rattled. But it must be admitted generally regarding cats, Persian and half-Persian, that their intellects, though sound, are somewhat slow.

What are the reasons that make the companionship of the cat so comforting? First, I should put their truly Oriental character and their love of Nirvana. I have read that the Romans could never tame cats, which was no doubt one of the reasons for their decline and fall. The Egyptians, as everybody knows, made a great deal of them, and they were a wonderful people; but I believe in Europe they first appeared as domesticated animals in Constantinople. If this is true, it is just what one might expect, for cats have much the spirit of the East. Philosophers have puzzled a great deal as to what Nirvana means, but, if they were to watch Samuel for an hour, they would understand the delicious



state in which it is possible to be nine-tenths asleep, and to use the remaining tenth of one's self in realising the pleasure of rest. Most attractive and Oriental also are their exquisite grace, their stillness and sureness of movement, their style, so to speak. Some of them are unduly ambitious and come to evil ends, but Samuel is not a cat of that sort. In his early years he used to cross the road occasionally and visit the house of Sir Walter, where I believe the servants were kind to him. But now for years he has strictly confined himself day and night to our house and small garden. He has very little curiosity, but when a new room was added to the house he showed great interest and examined every corner of it carefully, and I think he has been over every room of the house in the same way, though habitually he frequents but two.

Another reason for liking the companionship of cats is that they are affectionate. It is often said that they care for places only, and not for persons, or that, if they do care for persons, it is merely because they associate certain persons with certain comforts. No one who has studied cats will believe this. Samuel



## Samuel



is anything but demonstrative, but he has distinct likes and dislikes. When the boy was at home, Samuel was wont to visit him every morning and creep into his bed to be stroked, and trot after him down to breakfast. When the little lad went to school the cat was for a time inconsolable, searching for him all over the house, and mewling his discontent. When his friend came back again Samuel received him with a rapturous welcome. Sometimes when they are all out of the house, he comes up to my study, and it takes a great deal of caressing to quiet him. As a rule he does not like the study. The movement of books very much disturbs his comfort. As for strangers, he discriminates very sharply. He hates people who rush at him, and he must be courted in the old-fashioned, eighteenth-century style. Two or three times he has shown extraordinary partialities. One beautiful lady, who sometimes honours us with a visit, rouses him to the loudest demonstrations of approval. For some other people, again, even people who like cats, he shows a curious distaste. In the Surrey house, where we used to live at intervals, there was an immense and dignified cat, called Thomas.



## Samuel



He was originally wild, but was brought into the house and tamed. A more undemonstrative cat I have never known. It was very difficult to induce him to purr, though when I was writing he would sometimes come upon the table and be very cordial. Once upon a time, however, his master had a severe illness, and was confined to his bedroom for four months. The poor creature missed him, and dimly conceiving that it was his duty to protect him, went up to the room and established himself there, scarcely leaving his master's side day or night till he was better and up again. Once I went to see Thomas, with a distinguished novelist, who is a very big man. The novelist immediately stroked him in a peculiar way, and the animal seemed to waken up and become quite enthusiastic. My friend explained to me that there was a way of stroking cats, but declined to say anything further. Samuel is very fond of attention and very jealous, and these characteristics are common to most cats. True, they sometimes make great friends of dogs, though I always think that the cat is overshadowed by the dog, just as a girl is kept down by a brilliant and loquacious brother. Sometimes, too, they are



friendly with other cats, especially when they begin life together. Samuel, however, objects to any companion. We have a dog in Scotland, whom we should be very glad to have here, but none of us would think of hurting Samuel's feelings. Once, greatly daring, we brought a kitten, William, to share his room, but his unfeigned misery, a misery which changed his whole appearance, was too much for us, and William had to go. Cats are very kind to children, but they dislike babies in the early stage. Samuel likes to be talked about. If he is neglected he will roll himself on the hearthrug to attract attention. When he is spoken to, or when he hears his name in a conversation, he shows manifest satisfaction.

In my opinion the great charm of cats has never been properly noticed. It is their purring. What can be more restful than to listen to the loud purring of a cat? What can be more instructive? There you see pessimistic theories rebuked. Here is one creature in the world heartily and thoroughly content. You know that there are hundreds of thousands like him, and begin to suspect, if you are in the dumps, that you are disquieting yourself in vain, or at least,



that things will go better yet. I am persuaded that it is this pleasing habit that has made cats so popular. I wish it were more common in superior beings. What misery is made in human life by the detestable habit of grumbling. No wonder that the early books of the Bible should denounce so bitterly the murmuring of the Israelites. Murmuring just means grumbling. The evil that cursed the first ages of the world curses the last. One should at least be able to refrain from giving himself tongue. If he does, he makes his trouble far worse, and he loads the life of other people, who are just able to go on and no more. On the other hand, there are plenty of people who do not grumble, but who never purr. Purring is not bragging. Purring is an expression of gratitude and content. There are many hard-working folks, wives and mothers especially, who keep toiling all the time and never get a word of thanks. How different their lives would be if their husbands would purr when they came home! And why should wives not purr also, when it is possible to do so? Perhaps if they purred at a kind word they would hear more such words.





## Samuel



Samuel prefers to stay out at night, though he never goes beyond the gate. When I come home late he always rushes to me, rubs himself against me, and purrs most cordially. He expects to be caressed, and then he retires to his couch. I do not wonder that the old woman in Miss Wilkins' charming story had such comfort in her cat, William, her only companion. It seemed to her that, when William was lost, everything had gone with him. It was no use to go to a prayer-meeting or to church. The alleviation that made life tolerable had been taken away. When it was found that William had hidden away in a cellar and was still alive, how great was the revulsion!

And now to finish this letter. I should not dare to send the remaining paragraph even to the *Spectator*, and I am by no means certain that you will insert it. But it is a fact that on reading certain minor poets to Samuel I have found the intelligent creature show distinct signs of amusement. More than this, I tried him lately with some of our Laureate's laborious trash about the union between England and America. After hearing two stanzas he deliberately left the room.

## XIV

### *How to Remember and how to Forget.*

I RECEIVE many letters from persons who are anxious to strengthen their memory. Whenever memory systems are advertised, there are anxious souls who fervently hope they have found the thing they have long been seeking. You do not often hear people complaining very seriously about their memories, but it is clear to me that there are not a few who in secret are much exercised on the point. There are others who desire to forget. It may be worth while to put down a few suggestions on both subjects.

As to memory systems I have no personal experience, but I know that some are genuine and have been found very useful. They might, I should think, be specially useful to young persons with poor memories, who have to prepare for examinations. But I am not dealing with that class. I am speaking to those whose

## ☞ *How Remember and Forget* ☞

---

examinations are past, and who are annoyed and discomforted by the apparent failure of a most useful faculty.

In the first place, I should say that memory is to a large extent not a function of the brain, but a function of the heart. In other words, you remember what interests you. A true love will not forget. Take the tender relationship between a father and his daughters. Two daughters may profess affection equally. The one remembers her father's little tastes and fancies. Of these every man has some. They may seem small in themselves, but a great deal of life's comfort and peace depend upon them. One daughter will remember all these: will do the right thing and say the right thing. Another daughter will not be able even to recollect whether her father likes sugar in his tea. What is the secret of this difference? Simply this, that the one daughter truly loves and the other does not. Love does not consist in affectionate words or in caresses. The true love is always thoughtful, and it is appreciated and returned just in proportion as it is thoughtful. If any readers of these lines find it difficult to remember



## *How to Remember*



what are the preferences of their friends, they may be quite sure that it is because they are self-centred, and do not really care for their friends. They will find that just in proportion as they care, in that proportion they will find it easy to remember. This is why the excuse "I forgot" is so often a cruel stab. There are a great many people in this world who appear to be very amiable, and can smile and make themselves pleasant. But inside the cherry there is a hard stone, a hard heart that never goes any distance in thought except about itself. It is the unhappy wretched individual Ego, which is at the root of almost all human incapacity and misery. Think about your friends. Build them up in your imagination, fill up all the outlines, bring to mind their sayings and their doings escape from the narrow prison-house of self, and you will find that your memory is coming back to you as a companion of the heart.

To follow out this thought. What people remember is what they are interested in. If therefore, you are interested in much, you will remember much. Widen the range of your interests. It may be asked, How am I to become



interested in new subjects? To this the answer is, Learn something about them. The more you know, the more interested you will be in adding to your knowledge. Till you really know something and have laid a foundation, you cannot, of course, be interested. The ruin of many lives is that they are built upon sand. There is no foundation of knowledge, and often no foundation of character. It does not matter what is said or done to those people. Nothing helps them. However anxiously the structure may be built, it will sink in the sand at last. But an open mind at any age, however late, may be enlarged and enriched. The willingness to receive is the first thing. I was speaking with a novelist the other evening. He told me that in early days he had great difficulty in making a livelihood. Through the kindness of a friend he was offered a subordinate position on a journal about mechanics. He knew nothing of machinery, but he resolved to do his best. At first the work was exceedingly irksome, but he kept on. After some weeks the light suddenly dawned upon him. He began to feel that his subject was interesting. He went on and on, till ultimately



## *How to Remember*



he was offered the editorship of the paper, a position which he would have been quite competent to fill, and would have gladly accepted, had there not been by this time a better opening elsewhere. There are multitudes of people who never look at a newspaper, and some of them even make a boast of it. That grown-up men and women in an age like ours should not care to know what is going on is, beyond measure, disgraceful. They should begin at once a better course of life. At first they may not be interested, but if they will steadily persevere, they will begin to find that newspapers and books are a necessity. Until they become a necessity no good has been done. It is a poor business to read nothing ; it is even a poorer business to read under compulsion. One is inclined to say : He that is ignorant, let him be ignorant still.

Another way of strengthening the memory is to read with attention. There is a story of a great scientific man who said that he did not think he differed very much from his fellow human beings, except in the power of attention. When he took up a subject he concentrated



the whole force of his mind upon it. The reader whose memory is decidedly weak must at once greatly restrict himself. It is not for him to read omnivorously. He must confine himself to books that are worth careful study and careful thought. When he reads them he must dismiss everything else. He must not allow his thoughts to wander to his business or to his worries. He must be content to read very slowly. When he finishes a page he must, if not certain that he has got the meaning, read it over again. He must be constantly reviewing his reading. That is, before he begins afresh, he must interrogate himself on what he remembers. Many minds are like a purse with a hole in it. You may put into such a purse a sovereign every day, and yet you will be no richer at the end of the year, because the sovereigns have slipped through and there is nothing left. Of course, no mind, however tenacious, keeps all that it receives, and those memories that are very weak must be content if they can only keep one halfpenny out of the sovereign. By-and-by, if they are persevering and determined they will find that they are keeping



## *How* to Remember



more than the halfpenny. Even if they keep no more, they will find at the end of the year that they are not far from possessing a sovereign, and this is opulence compared to their former estate. I should say to all persons notably weak in memory : Read nothing but one newspaper and one good book at a time. By keeping something you will gradually become interested in keeping more. It is like saving. When young people have accumulated their first pound and put it into the bank, there is little fear. They will go on adding to the nucleus, and will probably die well off. It is a comfortable experience, no doubt, to become richer in money each year, but most of us find that it is not within our power. It is, however, within our power to become richer mentally every day and every year, and that is a far better thing.

One other suggestion. Persons of weak memory, and, indeed, all persons, will find the practice of committing to memory very useful. If you like a passage of poetry, learn a part. Everybody should be able to repeat at least twenty good poems and many little stanzas besides. In order to keep this you must be





continually repeating them. There is no better way of passing a dull journey in a train than in going over poems. I think it is even a better thing to learn some fine passage of prose. If you can let them remain in your minds, they will give you some idea of what can be done with words. If you repeat a passage of some great writer of English, like De Quincey or Charlotte Brontë, in an underground train or on any tiresome journey, you will generally find that you are not sure of some words, and you guess them. When you come home, look up the passage and see how much better, how inevitable is the word that the writer actually used. It is a humbling, but a very salutary experience.

Those who possess good memories are, so far, exempt from these rules. All such persons are keenly interested in many things, and can without effort attend closely to what really interests them. They can afford to forget a great deal that is not worth recalling. Many books read for amusement in weary hours need not be remembered. Many things it is best to forget. Still, as we grow older we are apt to forget



## *How to Remember*



that our memories weaken. This should teach us to make our possessions more secure. It should teach us also to be modest in our statement of facts. It is wonderful how the mist thickens over the past, and how many errors we may make in perfect good faith. Those who intend to write reminiscences should keep letters and diaries, or if they will not, they should write their reminiscences before they are fifty. Nothing is more astonishing than to come across people who have been in the habitual society of the greatest minds and who can tell you absolutely nothing. I found in a recent book a list of celebrities at a dinner party. Then comes: "And wasn't their talk worth hearing? You may imagine." Just so. There is no more interesting reading than a good book of reminiscences, but there are few such books. Macaulay says in the essay on Milton: "We imagine to ourselves the breathless silence with which we should have listened to his slightest word." Three times in my life I have felt the same about eminent persons, and in time I got the chance, and I am ashamed to say how little I retain, save in one case, where I wrote down



## *and how to Forget*



immediately after coming home all that I could remember of the great man's conversation. Let not people of weak and failing memory be unduly discouraged. If the weakness of memory is really another name for heartlessness, they ought to be discouraged. If it is only another name for stupidity and carelessness, they ought to be discouraged. If it means neither of these, they have a consolation that very few people can remember half as much as they wish to remember.

On the art of forgetting I have not much to say. Most men complain that they forget too easily. I have read

Roll back, pale Lethe. Let me see a gleam  
Of the returning glories of the day.

And, again, I have heard it said that "we forget, not because we will, but because we must." Others, however, remember too much. They are haunted for years, it may be day and night, with one disquieting, troubling, tormenting thought. It is the last at night. They waken up to it in the dark hours, when the tides of life run low. It comes to them with the morning

## ☞ *How Remember and Forget* ☞

---

light, it pursues them through the day. Some sin, some failure, some great sorrow, some baffled aspiration—it may be any of these. To such I would say: Avoid everything that feeds the memory. That is the first rule. Break off every association that tends to keep it living. And the next thing I should say is: “Time is your friend.” You will waken some day, if you will do your best, to “a morrow free of thought.” I do not mean by this that we should strive or desire entirely to lose the memory of our griefs. What we should seek is to have the sting drawn from them, so that they turn into sober joys and peaceful hopes.

## XV

### “ R.S.V.P.”

“ANSWER if you please.” Is not this one of the greatest, most exacting, and in a sense most holy demands that life makes upon us? A whole world of meaning is wrapped up in the familiar letters. We may start from their original sense and carry it up by plain and easy steps to the highest call the Divine can address to the human.

I will not say much about the demand which every letter almost makes for a reply. The tyranny of correspondence in these days becomes a formidable thing, even in the case of insignificant people. To answer even a dozen letters carefully will take up the best part of a morning, and many of us have not the time to spare. Our energy is consumed in attending to other work. Still, I think the busiest of public men do a great deal, from



sheer generosity of heart, to satisfy even those correspondents who are impertinent and intrusive. Every one knows Mr. Gladstone's diligence in this way, and I doubt whether there was any more amiable trait in his character. He knew what a postcard from him meant, and he did his utmost. The case of Lord Roberts will occur to every one, but there are others less known but even more significant. Matthew Arnold had the reputation of being supercilious, and he did something to deserve it. I understand that there is to be no authorised biography of him, and that we must be content with the volumes of letters issued by Mr. Russell. But I have had occasion to see at one time or another many letters written by Arnold to very humble authors, long letters too, answering with delicate courtesy the questions put to him, and criticising carefully. For this one cannot help loving Arnold. A still more remarkable instance was that of Charles Dickens, who, in the very height of his strenuous life, found time to write long letters of encouragement to contributors who showed any sign of promise. James Payn has told us how men used to come to him, and at



a certain stage of the conversation move their hands towards the breast-pocket of their shabby coats and extract a letter from the Chief Persons who write letters asking favours from those to whom they are strangers should construct silence charitably. It probably means that the receiver of the letter is not able to do anything, and that he is himself oppressed with work. Letters, I have no doubt, are doing much to kill public men. Bishop Creighton is an instance not to be soon forgotten.

R.S.V.P. to need, to poverty and sorrow, whether they speak or not. To eyes that are at once kind and keen the signs are generally manifest enough. You can usually read a deep trouble in a man's face or a woman's, or, for that matter, in a child's. As for worries that spring from disappointed vanity or ambition, they are perhaps best left alone; but we ought to have in us the eager impulse to hold up a falling and failing thing, and we all have seen, or might have seen, fellow-creatures who were just about to succumb. There are those who deliberately shield themselves from the appeal of distressed humanity. Alcestis, in William



## “ R.S.V.P.”



Morris's poem, when she is contemplating the surrender of her life for her husband, wishes that she had not borne a living soul to love.

Hadst thou not rather lifted hands to Jove  
To turn thine heart to stone, thy front to brass,  
That through this wondrous world thy soul might pass  
Well pleased and careless as Diana goes  
Through the thick woods, all pitiless to those  
Her shafts smite down?

There are those who see and have a heart, but somehow have no power of expression. There is a thin conventional crust, behind which a true flame of love is burning, and it usually makes itself manifest at last, by deeds certainly, and in the end by slow, difficult, but most meaningful words. But the commonest type is that of those who are too selfish, who are too much taken up with their own cares, who keep thinking of what others should do for them, and forget altogether what they might do for others. “Blind me with seeing tears until I see.”

R.S.V.P. to kindness. No doubt it is our duty to be kind, looking for nothing again, but





the kindness is strangely oppressed and chilled when no response is given. Children are taught, or used to be taught, to say “Thank you.” Many people, no longer children, have forgotten to do it. It is a rare thing to find any one who can say “Thank you” pleasantly and gratefully. And yet in ninety cases out of a hundred this is all that a benefactor desires. Perhaps the shyness comes half from shyness, half from pride. Gratitude is really felt, though it is not expressed. Yet what strange instances of downright thanklessness every one comes to experience. I have known a man hand over the careful savings of careful years to save a friend in difficulty without receiving at the time, or at any time, even so much as the most formal expression of thanks. I have known cases in which great efforts were systematically and patiently made to better the lot of a fellow-creature without special claim, and these efforts were resented rather than appreciated. I believe, indeed, that it needs more love in a human heart to take service graciously and gladly than to render service. And yet we should never drop from our prayers



the petitions : ‘Remember all who have ever shown us any kindness. May we never forget to be grateful.’ One dark feature of human life is the way in which people take for granted the kindness of those in the home with them. They ought to be, if possible, more grateful for the thoughtful love that watches over their ways and anticipates their wishes in the home circle than for anything they receive outside. And yet how many have nothing to say about it till they have lost the opportunity of speaking !

R.S.V.P. in conversation : I mean in conversation where you have fair play. There are talkers who address you, to use Queen Victoria’s happy phrase, as if you were a public meeting, and want no further response than a public meeting can give them. They do not even deserve what they want. But the great majority of people need response. It is not enough simply to listen, but if you are to draw out delicate natures with no great faculty of expression you must respond. Response is often to be found in a smile, in the sudden lightening of the eye, in a tear. It may be quite sufficiently



given in a “Yes,” or in a “Go on,” provided the words are spoken in genuine earnestness. There is no abiding enjoyment in talking to people who do not respond, who listen and half comprehend and half forget. But how happy to find some one who really cares to know what we feel and think! In George Macdonald’s great novel, *Robert Falconer*, he tells us that his hero’s first love was his violin. It understood him. Whether his mood was merry or sad, it responded. One of the great things to be done for the happiness of human life is to teach people to talk, to take pains about talking, to do their best to show the best that is in them to other people. Dull country towns and villages would become more desirable as places of residence than cities, if that could come to pass, for the only reason I ever saw for wishing to live in a big city is that, in a big city, you can gradually find a sufficient circle of congenial spirits. But everywhere there are men and women enough to support one another’s social needs, if only they would take the trouble. As they do not take the trouble, they soon exhaust each other’s mind. Conversation, even between



the most intimate, ought to be carefully prepared for—that is, each should reflect previously over what he is going to say to his friend, each should think over the probable experiences and circumstances of his friend.

R.S.V.P., once more, to the invitations of nature. Everywhere nature is saying to our dull eyes and ears: “Oh, look at me; oh, listen to me.” Most of us see nothing, hear nothing. We go for our walk, and we cannot tell when we come back what flowers are out, or what were the colours of the skies. I knew an old minister who had great happiness in his later years after reading Ruskin. He said Ruskin had enabled him to discover the sky, and so his life was doubled. Why should not children be taught to know the names of flowers and trees and stones? Why should they not be taught in some measure to observe, and to repeat their observations? When a boy, I had infinite delight in Longfellow’s poem “Hiawatha.” It first taught me to hear the voice of the woods, to discover that nature was not the dead thing I had fancied it, but full of life and utterance.



## “ R.S.V.P.”



---

Up the oak-tree, close behind him,  
Sprang the squirrel, Adjidaumo,  
In and out among the branches,  
Coughed and chattered from the oak-tree,  
Laughed and said between his laughing,

“Do not shoot me, Hiawatha !”

And the rabbit from his pathway  
Leaped aside, and at a distance  
Sat erect upon his haunches,  
Half in fear and half in frolic,  
Saying to the little hunter,

“Do not shoot me, Hiawatha !”

## XVI

### *Concerning Order and Method*

ORDER and method are great things, but they are not ends in themselves. What matters ultimately is, that a man should turn out good work and as much of it as he can safely accomplish. He will find it wise to be orderly and methodical in all things ; he will find it necessary to be orderly and methodical in some at least. But a man may be very orderly and very methodical, unimpeachable in all his habits, and yet he may accomplish the journey of life without leaving any clear track behind him. Let me write this week about things unessential and things essential.

It is no doubt very wise to have your library perfectly arranged. The books should be classified according to subjects. They ought to be always in their places. You ought, whenever you have finished with a book, to put it safely back



## Order *and* Method



in its place on the shelves. There ought to be no scattering of volumes belonging to the same work or the same author. There ought to be no heaps of books on the floor. All papers should be kept in their places, and the study table should be always clear, with the ink bottle filled to the proper point, and the necessary supply of pens in order. Grant all this, and what then? I have seen many such libraries out of which very little came. I have seen such libraries, and have been able to trace the year when the owner stopped reading. Their minds were like sea-beaches: you could trace the line of their last high tide. Many people there are who practically stop with Tennyson and Browning, with Dickens, George Eliot, and Thackeray. There are men in the dangerous period of middle life who get as far as Stevenson, and who will never get any further. There are others who are just kept going by Rudyard Kipling, and as Mr. Kipling is, happily, a young man, with much good work, let us hope, before him, they may survive for a time. I have seen very perfect libraries with splendid morocco and calf gilt belonging to the class who read Montaigne and quote Charles Lamb, and have at command a



## *Concerning Order*



stock of easy Latin phrases, and are characterised by a certain convexity of person. Those are delightful companions, but nothing very much ever comes of their activity. I know also very disorderly libraries where every law of arrangement is openly transgressed, and yet a good deal of work has come out of them. In this the result, and not the method, is the important thing. If a man can find his books and use them, if he knows what is in them, if he keeps reinforcing them, if he keeps his old friendships in repair, and if he is always making new friendships, then he need not be dismayed when confronted and accused by very spick-and-span persons, whose whole energy is apparently taken up with the arranging and dusting of their volumes.

Early rising is a very commendable thing. The early bird, it is well understood, catches the worm, and he is very welcome to it. Many of the great literary achievements of the world have been accomplished by very busy people who managed to begin their work early. Of Dean Milman, Macaulay said, very truly, that, though his style could not be defended, he managed to accumulate a number of interesting facts. When





his style is at its worst it is very bad indeed, and it was never worse than in his little memoir of Lord Macaulay. It is in extraordinary contrast with that of Sir Francis Palgrave, a distinguished contemporary of Milman's, now almost forgotten. Nothing, however, can detract seriously from Milman's well-earned place, and it is instructive to find that the hour worth all the rest of the day was the hour which he secured in the early morning. It was mainly by using this that he succeeded in discharging his clerical and social duties, and at the same time in preparing permanent contributions to literature. Still, many men, who have done a great deal of work, have not been early risers, and many men have risen early to do nothing worth speaking of. It is said of Mr. Balfour—I do not know what truth there is in the story—that he never gets up till one o'clock. I do not see that it is anybody's business so long as Mr. Balfour does his work, and if I am not mistaken he has accomplished his full share.

Exercise, again, is needed by everybody, and especially by literary men. We have always been told this, and on the whole great attention



## *Concerning Order*



is given to the counsel. I am of opinion that one hour's smart walking every afternoon is sufficient, and that this is the minimum. Many people, however, take no exercise. Mr. Chamberlain is said to be one of them. Yet Mr. Chamberlain's worst enemy has never denied that he is a very hard worker, and he is now well past sixty. I had a friend once who used to declare that he never took a walk without feeling distinctly the worse for it. It was difficult not to frown on such a lamentable defiance of common-sense and medical opinion; and yet, after all, it was the man's own business. He had to find out just how best he could do his work, and take that way. I am all for freedom in those respects, provided there is a genuine spirit of industry. Judge a man by what he does, and not by the way in which he does it. The latter is his business; it is not yours. We shall always want people like John Stuart Mill to write books about liberty. The tendency of thought is constantly to establish a tyranny: to tell you what you are to do, what you are to read, what you are to think, and to prescribe the method in each case. All I can say is,



that there are many people who never can and never will do their best work, unless they are allowed a margin of freedom, unless in many things they are a law to themselves.

But I grant that there are some things essential, though not many. In order to do the most we are capable of, the first rule is that every day should see its own work done. Let the task for each day be resolved and arranged for deliberately the night before, and let nothing interfere with its performance. It is a secret which we learn slowly—the secret of living by days. I am convinced that there are very few so precious. What confuses work, what mars life and makes it feverish, is the postponing of the task which ought to be done now. The word which John Ruskin had on his seal was “To-day.” To crowd two days’ work into one is the way to be unhappy and ineffectual. There is plenty of time for any man, and nobody can work well for more than a certain number of hours. “Without haste and without rest,” that is the true principle. It saves one from the haunted, hurried feeling which wears the nerves and brings down the temper, and



## *Concerning Order*



takes the peace out of life. This is a rule which has few little exceptions. There is one, however. A hard worker who delights in routine, and who is never so happy as when he is going on from day to day, and from week to week, with every hour planned and filled, will sometimes suddenly find that he cannot do anything. This is Nature's signal for rest, and it ought instantly to be obeyed. In these cases rest is probably not to be found in amusement. It is to be gained simply by ceasing from work until the impulse returns, as it will return. I suppose that many of us, when this experience comes, try, by violent efforts of will, to conquer the inertia. This is not wise in any one who knows that, whatever else he may be, he is at least not a habitual idler.

There is another virtue to which I attach great and growing importance, and that is the virtue of punctuality. You can never do anything in these days with anybody who is not punctual. Every business man knows this. You make an appointment for twelve o'clock, and at half-past twelve a man enters, and in-



dulges in witticisms about the conduct of his watch. It is not long since a person of this kind took his watch out and said proudly that the hour hand was a-wanting. You may be civil, but you are silently resolving to have nothing more to do with the man, and you are thinking how you fretted through and lost half an hour of good time in the best part of the day. The way to be punctual is always to be early. Make up your mind to be on the spot five or ten minutes before it is necessary, and there is no fear. When the virtue of punctuality is thoroughly acquired, other virtues come in its train. You generally find that the punctual person is at all times the trustworthy person. People would try harder for trustworthiness if they knew how lovable a quality it is. When you know you can rely upon any one, that whatever they undertake to do will be done, that you can really pass over a share of your load to them, you cannot help liking them. On the other hand, it does not matter how amiable men be, if they are forgetful, if they are unpunctual, if they habitually neglect, they become sources of such annoyance that



## *Concerning Order*



one's liking is apt to die out. Everybody who has visited much knows the difference between a household where things are done punctually, and one where they are not. I am not pleading for a ferocious punctuality, which may be made troublesome and even tyrannical. But any house where hours are not kept is sure to be miserable, wasteful ; in short, a house to be sedulously and firmly shunned.

Let me not be misunderstood. I advise all young people to be orderly in everything. I advise them to rise early and go to bed early. I advise them to take plenty of exercise. Only let them remember that they may do all those things and yet be absolutely useless. It does not matter how early you rise if you do nothing when you get up. It does not matter how much you do for the sake of your health, if you are a healthy good-for-nothing. You will never become intelligent by buying books and arranging them neatly, and treating them like bits of furniture. You must get the books into your souls. But, if the task of life is to be fulfilled adequately, there must be a plan and purpose in our lives, not necessarily



## *and* Method



---

recognisable by others, but well understood and strictly adhered to by ourselves. Undertakings should not be lightly made; but, when they are made, they should as far as possible be strictly adhered to.

## XVII

### *Should Old Letters be Kept?*

I HAVE received the following letter :—

A problem, which I should like to see you touch upon, is the problem of accumulation, not of money, but of books, papers, newspaper cuttings, scraps, notes, old letters, relics, programmes, etc. What is a good workable principle to guide us in keeping or rejecting? It is easy to fill drawers and cupboards. But the question will always arise: Is it worth the trouble? The mere matter of time presents a serious difficulty. It is possible to accumulate so much that a vast portion of one's leisure time might be taken up in the sorting and rearranging, the retaining and rejecting, to the exclusion of more profitable occupation. Yet much that is kept becomes of the greatest use and interest. Some old letters, in the light of after events, possess great and cherished value. Notes and scraps, pamphlets and papers, often prove of great, almost indispensable, service.

To the literary man, pure and simple, these accumulations form, no doubt, part of his stock-in-trade; and his library and furniture therein provide serviceable



## ♣ *Should Old Letters be Kept?* ♣

---

and get-at-able accommodation for them. But to the business man, who takes an interest in general matters outside his commercial affairs, and whose spare time is limited, it becomes a matter of difficulty to adjust the details of these accumulations in a proportionate and satisfactory way.

This is a really interesting and practical question. It must have perplexed most of us, and it is certainly not easy to answer. I will do my best, however.

In many respects the case for keeping books and letters and papers is very strong. As regards books, the old saying holds true that, if you keep anything for seven years, you will find a use for it. Again and again I have got rid of books, thinking they had served their turn, and after an interval have missed them and have bought them again. In papers one sees many things which he knows will be interesting in after years, and there is no better reading for hours of relaxation than the bound volumes of a really well-written journal. Then, as to letters, there are many which it is very hard to part with—letters of affection, letters from eminent people, letters that bear upon important turning-

## ♣ *Should Old Letters be Kept?* ♣

---

points in one's life. These one would rather retain; and, indeed, some of them will be kept, must be kept to the end. I do not imagine that Carlyle ever destroyed that letter of Sterling's which was "written in star fire and immortal tears," though I do not know that it has ever been published. Yet the difficulties of preservation are in each case enormous.

Consider first the accumulation of books. I am not speaking of those people who keep together a few volumes and never purchase any more. Everybody who cares for books goes on adding them to his collection. In ordinary houses there is hardly ever room for a large library. Dickens has immortalised the London study, the stuffy little room on the right hand as you enter the house, where no one ever reads a word. Even in the big and high-rented London houses you can scarcely find an ample book-room. So unless you are in a position to build your own place there must be selection. This is not so great a misfortune as it may look. After all, few people can do much with a very large library, and in any case it is a choice of evils. The amount of trouble and

## ♣ *Should Old Letters be Kept?* ♣

---

discomfort involved in the keeping together a great and growing collection of books is more than the result justifies. I do not intend ever to possess more books than I have now—that is, as new books come in I shall go on sifting the old. No doubt mistakes will be made; but upon the whole, when the balance is struck, it is better to have a manageable library, no more books than you are able to handle or use. We who live in London have a great advantage. The British Museum Library is accessible, and at the worst we can find our lost treasures there. I wish that there were more people afflicted with the perplexity of not knowing what they are to do with their books. However, bad as the times may be, there are still a good many of us who love books, and will have them at the cost of some real self-denial.

With regard to papers, it is easy to point out the ideal way, but very difficult to follow it. It would be well to have large scrap-books to cut out interesting paragraphs and articles, and to preserve them in that way. Many of us, however, are totally disqualified. We never could

## ♣ *Should Old Letters be Kept?* ♣

---

possess, or at least have within our reach at the same time, a scrap-book, scissors, a gum-pot and a brush. All these are necessary, if the work is to be done. I once bought a pair of scissors for the purpose, and carried them faithfully about for nearly a year. The results were disappointing, as I never had gum just right and ready when the work was to be done. However, I have three scrap-books, and two of them are full. They were made a very long time ago, but I occasionally find them useful to this day. All my life I have believed in jotting down interesting things that you meet with in your reading, but owing to the difficulty of having a pencil and a note-book ready *at the same time*, have never got beyond one page, and have had to trust my memory entirely for illustrations and references. It is consoling to know some friends who are more businesslike, and keep on collections of different kinds. They always tell me that they get some good out of these volumes, and it may well be so. One substantial reason against keeping notebooks is that the practice does tend to weaken the memory, although I am sure it would pay one to read always with a pencil and notebook in hand.

## ❧ *Should Old Letters be Kept?* ❧

---

The most difficult question of all is the disposing of old letters. Are they to be all burnt? Certainly very many of them should be burnt. There cannot be more than a small proportion worth the trouble of keeping. There is a great deal to be said in favour of preserving letters from notable people, although personally I have not done it to any extent. I sometimes wish that I had, but on the whole the wish is feeble. Letters of affection raise a question which comes home to most people. It has been discussed in an interesting way by a clever American novelist, Mrs. Edith Wharton, in a little book entitled *A Gift from the Grave*, which John Murray has recently published. Mrs. Wharton's treatment is too too—she writes like Henry James when he is most clever and most provoking. She tries to render complexities and sinuosities of feeling and thought which remain obscure after her strength is exhausted. But she has real strength, and her story is well worth reading. It tells how a man received love-letters from a famous woman. He did not love her, but she went on writing and writing, till at last she died. He kept the letters, and ultimately he fell in love and wanted to

## ☞ *Should Old Letters be Kept?* ☞

---

marry. He was poor, and in order to make a little money he sold the letters to a publisher, and they were given to the world under the lady's name. His wife discovered what he had done, and naturally did not admire the proceeding. Therefore he passed through a complicated repentance, very cleverly described by Mrs. Wharton. The whole thing, however, could have been put by Artemus Ward in one sentence. The man felt himself a "mean cuss," and so he was. Ultimately he and his wife became better friends than ever. He should not have published the letters. We shall all agree about this. Should he have kept them? I think not; at least, he should not have kept them after he became engaged to the other woman. No doubt genuine love-letters have an interest. We read them every day in breach of promise cases, and editors show a true instinct in printing them at length. But are they edifying? Mr. Barrett Browning did a very bold thing when he published the love-letters of his father and mother, but the step he took was fully justified. If we had all the letters which Tennyson and his wife exchanged during their long engagement, we should

## ☞ *Should Old Letters be Kept?* ☞

---

know more of Tennyson than any biography could tell us. But the feeling remains that, save in a few extraordinary instances, we have no right to know. Love-letters ought not to be published. They were not written for outsiders. There is something in the nature of sacrilege in revealing them to the world, and if it is the case that they should not be published, it is doubtful how far they should be kept. At any rate, a man should see that they are destroyed before his death. The same principle applies to all very intimate letters. If you wish to understand, consider how you would feel if your most intimate letters were made in any way public. This is a question which every man and every woman may put and answer. We should all say, I imagine, "Burn my letters," and it is easy to see what would happen if the desire were carried out. There would be no problem then. Yet, after all, perhaps few of us are strong enough to get rid of all our treasure. Dr. Johnson kept almost to the end the letters of his mother and of Molly Aston, the sweetheart of his youth. When life was ebbing to its close he burned

## 🍷 *Should Old Letters be Kept?* 🍷

---

them : his mother's with a flood of tears. Of Molly Aston's, he said to Mrs. Piozzi, they should be the last papers he would destroy. If the truth were known, it would be found that most of us have some secret place where a few letters are hidden. We shall never open it till the goal is in sight, and even then we shall not take courage to read the fading leaves. We should almost be glad to hear that all had disappeared in ashes, and yet we have not the courage as yet to make an end.

It will be seen that I favour the practical destruction of everything in the way of papers and letters as, on the whole, the least evil. There are exceptions, however, which should be noted. Those persons who have large means and much leisure may do what others cannot. I heard the other night of a man who keeps up a large correspondence with his friends. He has nothing else to do, and when he receives their letters he copies out what he thinks the best parts of them in large volumes provided for the purpose. He has accumulated quite a row of this correspondence, and if he were a person of any consequence he could no doubt



## ☞ *Should Old Letters be Kept?* ☞

---

write a full and accurate autobiography. Certainly, if he means at the close of his career to write reminiscences, he should carefully preserve documents. Thomas Mozley, when he published his reminiscences of the Oxford Movement, said very truly that recollections were "subject to a lower depravation, the blending of fact with fiction." He added a remark which many of us must have found true in experience: "Nor is it a matter in which confidence is any assurance, for those who remember most exactly are often the most wrong. At least, they are not more likely to be right than others." Yes, we must admit that memory does not serve us perfectly, and that it is often least to be trusted on the points where it is most dogmatic. Mr. Mozley wrote his reminiscences from memory alone. He had a mass of letters and journals, but he did not consult them, as his sight was nearly gone. In consequence he got into some trouble, and made a poor figure in controversy with Archdeacon Denison and others. If a man has an interesting story to tell, he may do it without offence and without egotism; only, let him preserve letters and keep

## ♣ *Should Old Letters be Kept?* ♣

---

journals, and be sure of facts, lest he find memory playing the traitor at the hour when he most needs her.

I take up a weekly paper and find a story of the late Sir John Hassard, the late Registrar of the Province of Canterbury. Sir John had trouble with Archbishop Benson, whose temper was sometimes uncontrollable. On one occasion the Registrar told his Grace, after a violent scene, that his self-respect forbade him to remain in his presence, and he left the palace, meaning never to return. Within an hour a very frank apology came from the Archbishop. Sir John hesitated as to whether he should not burn it, but he decided not to. He said, "Who can tell what questions may arise as to my conduct after I am dead? I am justified in keeping the letter for my honour's sake, and for that of my family." In this he was right, and the few among us who may be written of after death are wise in retaining all papers which will explain their motives and their conduct. Happily the terror of a biography does not disturb very many. Obscure people, who will be utterly forgotten by all but a faithful

## ♣ *Should Old Letters be Kept?* ♣

---

few within a week after their deaths, have no account to render to the press, and perhaps they will find it wisest to keep the sweetness and the bitterness of the past in the sanctuary of their own hearts, and take care that no stranger shall intermeddle with it.

## XVIII

### *The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae*

IN Mr. Hardy's powerful story, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, he is more merciful to the sweet and patient Elizabeth Jane Farfrae than to almost any of his heroines. He even allows that she has a measure of happiness in life, notwithstanding some deep and sharp regrets. Her secret is that "of making limited opportunities enduring ; which she deemed to consist in the cunning enlargement by a species of microscopic treatment, even to the magnitude of positive pleasure, of those minute forms of satisfaction that offer themselves to everybody not in positive pain ; which thus handled have much of the same inspiring effect upon life as wider interests cursorily embraced." Mr. Hardy, I believe, disclaims the name of pessimist, but he is careful even in this concession to guard himself against optimism. "Her experience had

## ❧ *The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae* ❧

---

been of a kind to teach her, rightly or wrongly, that the doubtful honour of a brief transit through a sorry world hardly called for effusiveness, even when the path was suddenly irradiated at some half-way point by day-beams rich as hers." The late Mr. Hamerton also disclaimed pessimism, but he admitted that he thought it was a pity that the earth and its inhabitants had ever been created. To the question, "Would you, if you had the power, put an end to the suffering on our own planet, by the instantaneous and painless extinction of all human and animal life?" he declined to reply. He was unwilling to undertake personal responsibility for the extinction of life, but looked upon its sure extinction in the course of nature without the slightest disapproval, and with very little regret. He even compared the continent of Africa with the desolate lunar landscape of windless mountains, and declared that, to him, it seemed that Africa was the sadder sight. Without entering into questions like these, I think that there is something that deserves consideration in Mrs. Farfrae's method of making limited opportunities endurable. There is much in the saying that we ought not

## ❧ *The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae* ❧

---

to pursue happiness, but it must not be taken too absolutely. There is the happiness that is overtaken and the happiness that overtakes, and the second is the sweeter. Nevertheless, just as we make plans for learning and plans for worldly success, and plans even for winning love, there is a place for a wise consideration in the ordering of our life.

I am thinking of those whose life is obviously limited, whose opportunities are few, who have occupations, but not occupations or amusements enough to keep them from dulness and weariness. There are many people in great cities who are overburdened, who have no time for reflection except when they cannot sleep, and whom old age surprises in the height of their energies. These need a word of caution. They lose much if they lose the power of enjoying leisure, that leisure which breathes in Dyce's picture of Bemerton, and belongs to the Sunday afternoons in *Adam Bede*. They should be careful not to imagine that they are indispensable, that when they sit still and fold their hands the wheels of the universe drag heavily, and all nature is out of joint. They will be wise if

## ♣ *The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae* ♣

---

they always remember that real work, the labour of the hand and brain, soul and spirit, is but a venture. What comes of it we cannot tell, and need not inquire too curiously. What we are concerned with is that the work should be done faithfully so far as we can do it, while the issues are left to develop themselves.

At the same time it is an equal error to imagine that work in itself is a cause of misery, and that to get rid of it would be the entrance into peace. Charles Lamb used to say that, if he had a son, he would call him Nothing-to-do, and he should do nothing. But, if the son had ever existed, he would have rebelled against his lot. For the most of us there is neither too much work nor too much leisure. We have at best only our evenings to play with, and happy is the man who redeems his evenings. He may spend them in congenial study, or with friends, or best of all, if that is possible, in his domestic circle. Two pictures of a redeemed evening rise before me. In that rejected first book of Charlotte Brontë, which some think the best of all her works, because it has the most of her own heart and life, she draws the evening as

## ❖ *The Secret of Mrs. Frafrae* ❖

---

she would have made it for herself, had the chance been given her. The husband and the wife both earned their bread by exercise, and that of the most arduous kind. "Our days were thoroughly occupied; we used to part every morning at eight o'clock and not meet again till five. But with what sweet rest did the turmoil of each busy day decline! Looking down the vista of memory I see the evenings passed in that little parlour, like a long circle of rubies circling the dusky brow of the past. Unvaried were they as each cut gem, and, like each gem, brilliant and burning." And the author of *Mark Rutherford* tells us: "It was a comfort to me to think that the moment the clock struck seven my second self died, and that my first self has suffered nothing by having anything to do with it. Who was to tell the revulsion on reaching home, which I should never have known had I lived a life of idleness? Ellen was fond of hearing me read, and with a little care I was able to select what would bear reading. Oh, how many times have I left my office humiliated by some silently endured outbreak on the part of my master, the more



## 🍷 *The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae* 🍷

---

galling because I could not put it aside as altogether gratuitous, and in less than an hour it was two miles away, and I was myself again ! ”

I am thinking, however, of those who, whether they complain or not, feel that their lives are dull. They are drearily situated in remote places, where they have little or no congenial companionship. Their tasks are not outwardly and visibly imposed upon them. Life is grey and sombre. It lacks interest, and there is nothing in the future to promise refreshment. I am not thinking of those who are baffled and heartsore with many anxieties, or stunned by a reverse of fortune, but of men and women who are accounted enviable by their neighbours, and yet feel in their heart of hearts that life is slipping away from them, and that they are not making the best of it. To such Mrs. Farfrae's secret should be very useful, and it may be applied in various ways.

(1) The first thing to do is to make the best of what you possess, to cultivate a knowledge and a love of your surroundings. Imagine, if you can, that the axis of the earth projects from the centre of your village square. According to

## ❧ *The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae* ❧

---

*The Autocrat* this is the belief of good Bostonians about Boston, and it makes them happy. The habit of grumbling at a monotonous, uninteresting environment is very dangerous. Psychologists tell us nowadays that, if we act up to what we wish to believe, we shall attain belief at last. And every part of God's world has its own quality and attraction, did we but know it. I think women are more easily able to do this than men are. There is the feminine instinct of clinging to what is nearest and most familiar. It is notably illustrated in the life of Mrs. Browning. When she went from England to Italy, England became to her almost at once a memory, a vision seen through half-closed eyes. Her whole affections seemed to concentrate at once upon Italy. One would have to make-believe very much, before a Scotch or English village could put on for him the loveliness of Italy. And yet, by taking thought, each may find his home richer in beauty than he had thought it.

(2) It is still more necessary to cultivate a kindly interest in your kind. Gossip has been very much denounced, and there is a kind of

## 🍷 *The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae* 🍷

---

gossip which does great mischief. Mrs. Candour has her representatives in these days. I doubt, however, whether the slaughter of character goes on as quickly as in the old time. One does occasionally meet an old lady with an abnormal passion for tea, and an equally abnormal knowledge of the peerage, both of which seem to belong to an earlier period. But kindly gossip is the salt of conversation. It is inhuman to live in the country and to care nothing for the joys and sorrows of your neighbours. People love and prize sympathy more than anything else, and they will forgive much to a sympathetic gossip. The neighbours who never speak of them because they do not care to know about them are regarded with a just aversion.

(3) Still it must be admitted that men and women whose conversation is merely gossip are sure to deteriorate till they become intolerable. It is necessary to be in contact with a broader life than that of the country parish or the little town. Well, there is always the escape of books. The mind in a quiet and leisurely life must be able to a large extent to feed, not upon itself, but upon its own possessions, and to furnish

## ❖ *The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae* ❖

---

its own delights. The chief misery of an isolated life is that in many cases it dwarfs and stunts the intellect. It may even kill all intellectual curiosity, and that is death indeed. In order to prevent this it is wise to carry on a course of reading or study. I know a country gentleman who many years ago took up Egyptology. He has pursued it with great diligence, and has now so good a knowledge of the subject that he is able to meet on fairly equal terms the best experts. It has been a wonderful thing for him in many ways, chiefly because it has kept the current of his mind clear, and has given him a new interest in life. It has also been the means of winning some valuable friendships. Be it observed that the study would have been comparatively useless if it had been languidly pursued, but it was carried out with earnest perseverance. I should not greatly pity any friend in his loneliness, if I knew that he had an interest of this kind. I am far from saying that young men should imitate Lord Lytton's hero, who shut himself up in a country house at the age of twenty, that he might read the minor Platonists. I do say that every one

## ❧ *The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae* ❧

---

should take care, lest they lose by neglect that power of finding their pleasure in books and thoughts, which is the least alienable perhaps of all our possessions, which may be continued to us when the most precious things are taken, leaving life more than endurable, even happy and peaceful.

(4) I should lay great stress also upon correspondence. When all is said and done, the chief disadvantage of a life in remote parts is the want of congenial human intercourse. It is not good for a man that he should find everything he wants in that way under his own roof. There is a family selfishness as corroding as an individual selfishness. Now there are many places where a man may live for many years and never find a true comrade, one to whom he can thoroughly open up his mind. The friends of his heart are far distant. The correspondence that once passed has been neglected, and has almost dropped away. One ought to have certain things to look forward to every day, and the chief thing no doubt will be as a rule the letters. You cannot get good letters unless you write them. Your post will be pretty much

## 🍀 *The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae* 🍀

---

what you make it. Very busy men have no time for private correspondence, but most women can write, and they ought to write and keep up the links between their husbands and their old friends until emancipation comes and their husbands can take the pen in their own hands. I am sure that not half enough is made of correspondence as a sweetener and solace of life. Most people at certain periods of their life have had intimate correspondence, and I appeal to them whether they were not greatly helped and cheered and soothed, not only by the letters they received, but by the letters they wrote. Elderly people, in particular, ought to keep their friendships and their correspondence in repair.

(5) But, after all, the great secret of happiness is to seek the happiness of others. There is no such peace to be found in the world as the peace that comes to those who are working for the good of their fellow-creatures. A man who gives himself truly to the service of the needy is never, so far as I have seen, an unhappy man. The quest for a selfish happiness will be defeated, but, as we seek to bring brightness into the lives of others, our own darkness will be

## ❧ *The Secret of Mrs. Farfrae* ❧

---

strangely lightened. There is something in this world which in the midst of disappointments does not disappoint, and

The man whose eye  
Is ever on himself, doth look on one  
The least of nature's works.

## XIX

### Brilliance

WHAT do we mean when we speak of a person being brilliant? Perhaps some help to the answer will be found in the etymology of the word. Brilliant, I believe, comes from beryl, and thus brilliancy will mean the quality of a jewel, the flashing, lustrous quality. With this clue we may consider the question.

A sharp line must be drawn between brilliancy in writing and brilliancy in conversation. It often happens that one who writes brilliantly does not talk in the same way. There are exceptions, of course. Mr. George Meredith, for example, is equally brilliant in his books and in his conversation. It happens also that people who are brilliant in talk are quiet and tame in writing. There is a lustre in their spoken speech, a freshness and glow in their thoughts when stirred by the stimulus of living presences, which seems





## Brilliance



somehow to depart when they write for print. They cannot dictate, and when they dip their pen in ink the life of their mind seems to depart, and all becomes conventional. Johnson, no doubt, was a great writer, but, save in occasional passages, hardly a brilliant writer. In conversation, however, his brilliance was incessant. I wish to speak rather of brilliancy in talk than of brilliancy in writing, and this for a reason which will appear immediately.

The property of a jewel is to flash, and to flash unexpectedly, to take different aspects as you take it different ways, but always to shine. A few people possess this strange power. Those who are with them cease to be listless. They are eager to watch the gleams of light that flash from them in a rayless, unilluminated world. If there is a Boswell present to take down their talk, it is worth reading when it is reproduced, but not half so much worth reading as it was worth hearing ; for the brilliant person has a certain radiance which comes out in the eyes, in the gestures, in the tones of the voice, in the quick, impetuous way of speech. It is natural for a jewel to flash, and it is natural for the brilliant person to be



brilliant. It has been said that nobody was ever eloquent by trying to be eloquent, but only by being so. Grand speeches come only from grand thoughts, and passionate speech from passionate feeling. You may imitate the phrases of an orator, his pomp of words and his rhythm, but you cannot imitate his eloquence. Is it not Ruskin who says that no man need try to be a prophet? Your business is to go on quietly with your hard camp work, and the Spirit will come to you in the camp, as it did to Eldad and Medad, if you are appointed to have it. If you are not appointed to have it, there is nothing left but submission. A great element of brilliancy is that it surprises. The brilliant person can compass strange alliances, can bring together words that have hitherto been strangers, and see the relation between remote facts and make them throw light upon one another. He has almost always a certain gift of style. As a rule his range of knowledge and observation is wide, but perhaps his main power is shown in giving fresh colour and significance to what has become pallid, unmeaning, or, to say the least, hopelessly commonplace. Here De Quincey's dicta about



## Brilliance



style come in well. Style, says De Quincey, has two functions. The first is to brighten the intelligibility of the obscure; the second is to regenerate the normal impressiveness of subjects that have become dormant to the sensibilities. The brilliant person will ordinarily have a copious memory for words and facts, but beyond this quality is the power to select, the power to extricate relations to which others have been blind, to refresh and retrace the lineaments that have begun to decay and fade. I may seem to be confusing brilliancy of speech with brilliancy in writing, but it is not so. One of the obscure great critics of England has said that eloquence is heard and poetry is overheard. Eloquence supposes an audience. The poet is unconscious of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessed in moments of solitude to itself, while eloquence pours itself out to other minds, and is magnified in its expression by their presence. Is it not true that the French are the most eloquent and the least poetical of nations?

Brilliancy, it need hardly be said, is very rare, as rare at least as the most precious jewels. In the whole course of my pilgrimage I have met



## Brilliance



with, perhaps, three persons who might be called brilliant in conversation, who in any room and in any company would soon draw all eyes and ears. That is a small number out of so many, many highly and variously gifted. As things are, or as things have been, one might expect to find that brilliant men are twice as numerous as brilliant women. With the changes in education, however, I should not be at all surprised if the proportion were reversed, and that in no very long time. Just because brilliancy is so uncommon, it will always be prized, will always make an impression greater than perhaps it deserves to make. I read in a newspaper the other day that the price of diamonds was likely to increase very much. Yet a life may be lived in comfort and in peace by people who possess no diamonds. As a matter of fact, I excessively dislike to see a man displaying diamonds in any way, and I think the dislike is not uncommon. Oliver Wendell Holmes allowed a gentleman to wear a signet ring, and one ring ought to be sufficient. I tremble to speak of the other sex, but some persons at least are of the opinion that very few women, if they were wise, would indulge in



## Brilliance



a lavish show of diamonds. Be this as it may, however, there is little question that to the end of time diamonds will retain their value, and so in the same way a brilliant personality will win for itself wonder and regard to the end of time, in a world that is so drab, so ordinary, so humdrum, so commonplace. The person who considers himself brilliant may complain that he is not properly appreciated. He may comfort himself with the maxim, *Margaritas ante porcos*, but is he sure that he was strewing real pearls? It is perhaps more likely that the pearls were mock pearls than that his audience were swine.

Still, there is a certain drawback to brilliancy. That, too, is a jewel's quality. It has its hardness. Brilliant persons are delightful for the time, but one cannot live upon mere brilliancy. George Henry Lewes, who was qualified to speak on the subject, said very pathetically that in life, as in literature, our admiration for mere cleverness has a touch of contempt in it, and is very unlike the respect paid to character. He goes on to affirm that no talent can be supremely effective, unless it act in close alliance with certain moral qualities. Lewes was much



## Brilliance



more remarkable for cleverness than for character: but he knew the better part, even if he did not choose it. I used to think that Kingsley's line,

Be good, my child, and let who will be clever,

might be taken as an insult. I see now that I was wrong. Kingsley was not disparaging cleverness. What he meant was that, however far cleverness may go, life and the happiness of life depend upon it very little, while they absolutely depend upon goodness. It is human goodness tried and proved by which we poor creatures are enabled to face the storms of time. We are glad sometimes to see the jewels flashing, but if we never saw them we should not miss them much. Without goodness to look up to and to lean upon, our strivings would soon end.

And yet all brilliancy is not hard. There is a certain form of brilliance which draws out in a wonderful way everything that is best in others. Some brilliant talkers coruscate and coruscate, and care for nothing but the responsive look and murmur of admiration. There



## Brilliance



are others, not less gifted than they who listen as well as speak, who can take an ordinary remark and light it at the fire of their own bright spirits, and give it back to the astonished speaker irradiated and glorious. That is, indeed, a celestial talent, and there are few finer experiences that come to most of us dull people than to have come, whether it be once or twice in a lifetime, within its friendly play.

I had intended to say something about brilliant writing, but my space is exhausted. The tendency of the day is to depreciate brilliance in writing, to speak of it as tinsel, as unreal splendour, as mere intellectual fireworks. What was called prose poetry has practically disappeared. Colour and adornment in style are looked upon with considerable suspicion, although such writers as Stevenson and Pater have given individuality a chance. We are told that nowadays style should be simply a transparent medium for thought. I set little store by such doctrine. It is the kind of doctrine with which a commonplace generation comforts itself. It knows it cannot be brilliant, and it says that brilliancy is a censurable and even a



## Brilliance



shameful thing. Nonsense! Let the brilliant writer rise, and he will soon change all that. Do not talk about certain styles as dead and buried; do not say that even prose poetry will not be revived. Let another Milton rise, just as eloquent as the old Milton, and we shall listen spellbound with delight and awe to his music. We are very tired, it may be allowed, of little Macaulays; but if Macaulay were to come back again, we should rush for his books as greedily as our fathers did. We knew very well when Ruskin departed that there was much that went with him, and that precious secrets were buried in his grave. The brilliant writer, the brilliant talker, the brilliant speaker—all of them are needed in our day more than they ever were, and will not fail of joyous welcome and full reward.



## XX

### *On* Handwriting

I HAVE no doubt that character is revealed more or less by handwriting. There is, I believe, a science of the subject, and books embodying it, but I have never read any of the rules, and am entirely ignorant of it. If any person who has a large correspondence begins to study the handwriting of his correspondents in connection with their characteristics otherwise known to him, he will find more and more that there is a strange harmony. He will even, in time, perhaps, come to believe that if he closely studies the handwriting of an unknown correspondent he may be able to make some shrewd guesses as to the history and the disposition of the writer. He will do this, not by the application of rules, but by a kind of instinct. You cannot tell a man how to fish. An expert angler is hardly ever able to put his practical knowledge into propositions and



## *On Handwriting*



formulas. I doubt whether a good golfer can give hints of much value to other people. He knows that he should do this or that in order to succeed, but in doing it he does not apply rules, but acts from an experience more or less unconsciously built up. So that I do not suppose my reflections will be of any use to other people, though I try to set them down as clearly as I can.

The great distinction between handwritings is that between the educated and the uneducated. Broadly speaking, there is an educated handwriting and an uneducated, and there are grades in education which handwriting reveals. But in these days almost everybody is taught up to a certain point, and the uneducated handwriting cannot be so well classified. I know just one case of a highly educated person writing a thoroughly uneducated hand, and I have no doubt there is some explanation for it. She is a highly cultured lady, and brilliant in conversation. Her style, however, when she writes, is poor and uncoloured, and her handwriting resembles that which I have seen come from workhouses. Allowing for this exception, I have never been deceived. The educated hand may be a very bad



## *On Handwriting*



hand, but it is unmistakable. There is also the handwriting of the scholar, which is, as a rule, very precise and careful, but not beautiful. There is the handwriting of the man of culture, which in many cases is very graceful. Dean Church wrote to the last a most beautiful hand, a handwriting which could not have been owned except by a man of the highest refinement and taste. In his early days, before he dabbled in journalism, Mr. W. H. Mallock also wrote a singularly beautiful hand. These two, Dean Church and Mr. Mallock, are on the whole the best calligraphers I have ever known. When to culture and scholarship there is added imagination, it is apt to spoil the hand, which becomes then in certain cases sprawling and irregular. From Mr. Swinburne's handwriting of twenty years ago, I think you could have told that he was a poet and a man of genius. Young people ought to persevere with their handwriting, at least until it becomes an educated handwriting. Yet perhaps this is not necessary. If they go on educating themselves and mastering new provinces of knowledge, they will come inevitably to reveal their acquirement by their handwriting.

There is also in handwriting much unconscious



## *On* Handwriting



revelation of character. By far the clearest and the most certain is the revelation of what I may call, for want of a better name, self-consciousness or un-self-consciousness. It would not be a great error to say that this is the difference between modesty and conceit. Everybody knows this up to a certain extent. There is no getting away from an affected signature. When a man has to write a difficult signature for banknotes or for business purposes he may possibly be excused, but the man who, in his ordinary communications, prepares an elaborate and uniform signature, stamps himself not necessarily as a foolish or wicked or unfriendly person, but as one who is accustomed to think much of himself. Young men, as well as old, are apt to err in this way. I remember some years ago receiving a letter from a young man in which the signature occupied half a page of ordinary note-paper. I made up my mind that there was nothing for that young man but to wait and learn. Some years afterwards I received another letter from him. The signature was still too large, but not abnormally so. I was not surprised to hear that he was at last beginning to make good progress. When he



## *On* Handwriting



becomes a really successful man no doubt his signature will be like the signatures of other people. There are a few—a very few—literary people who write their signature in quite another manner from the body of their letters, and every one of them is a person with whom vanity is a disease, and very nearly a madness. There are many authors who do not go so far as this, but go quite far enough to show that they are in reality self-conscious. They never write their names without reflecting that these names are of significance in the world. Another very trustworthy indication is the manner in which the pronoun “I” is written. On this I might say much, but I am afraid of personalities. Suffice it that wherever you have a person who writes the pronoun “I” just as he would write the great letter in the word “Irish,” you may be tolerably sure of meeting a decent fellow. If, on the other hand, the “I” is contorted and queer, you are face to face with self-consciousness at the very least, and probably with something worse than that.

Another fairly safe discrimination in handwriting is that between the trustworthy and the untrustworthy. I know some handwritings in



## *On* Handwriting



which no untruth, no false vow, no baseness of any kind could possibly be written ; just as I know faces which tell me in a moment that the soul which looks through them may be trusted all in all and for ever. There are other handwritings so weak, so shifty, so flabby, and so unsettled that one wants to be sure before believing anything, though I am bound to say that often the owners are better than their script. But without going so deep as that, you have handwritings which tell you that in business matters the owner is to be relied on. If he says that he will deliver you a manuscript on Tuesday at twelve o'clock, you may be quite certain it will come, and that it will be decently done. Other handwritings suggest that you will get a letter on Tuesday at the appointed hour, explaining that the author is prostrate with neuralgia, and has not been able to do anything. Of course, there is illness that is disabling and prostrating, but there is illness through which a man can keep on doing his work ; and the people I like least in the world are the numerous class who believe that when anything is the matter with them they are at once absolved from every duty but that of attending to



themselves. I have through many years been accustomed to judge questions of this sort merely on the indications of handwriting, and I have hardly ever found myself mistaken.

Another distinction of handwriting, which is also a very clear one, is that between conciliatory and unconciliatory people. I have before my mind an example of a handwriting well known to me. It would show to all, except very dense people, that the writer was of an anxious, winning, apologetic, deprecating nature. You can see the letters bowing and scraping—sometimes almost kneeling. Other handwritings, again, tell you that the writer has not thought at all whether he will please you or not. He is simply doing what he conceives to be his duty. And there are handwritings of people whom you instinctively know to be deliberately aggravating. They are in the habit of annoying their own people at home. They are accustomed to nag; the habit has become second nature to them, and they try it with editors, who, as a rule, are not distinguished for patience. The ideal handwriting is the handwriting which shows the gentleman—not anxiously conciliatory, but still not willing to give offence.



## *On* Handwriting



I will mention but one more distinction, and that is between the strong and the weak. There are handwritings which show clearly that the writer will see a thing through, will not easily be daunted by difficulties, and will accept defeat only at the sword's point. There are other handwritings so weak and so characterless that you are sure the possessors will never win a fight. And there are others, and this is a very common type of character, which show what I may call weak strength. The writers imagine their achievements very vividly, and go at them with a rush, but when they meet with determined opposition they soon give in. This kind of character is shown in the use of thick ink, broad pens, and large letters breaking into small letters at the end of a word.

I conclude with some cautions. Handwriting depends to a great extent on the teacher. Ladies were taught in the old days to write an angular hand. They are now taught, apparently, for the most part to write a large black hand, such as might be produced by quills. The old style was the more feminine, and the new style is perhaps the more legible. But it is difficult to draw any sure conclusion from the writing of young persons.





As time goes on, however, things clear themselves up, and the character finds its way into the work. Of handwriting done in the way of business not much can be said. The writer knows for what purpose the work is to be used, and does not indulge in individual flourishes. And there are a great many people also of whose handwriting you can only say that it suggests an overworked and hurried life. You can see that the writer is working up to or beyond the limit of his powers, and that when he sits down to pen the letter the whole thought in his mind is to finish it, seal it up, and send it off as soon as possible.

## XXI

### *The Happy Life*

IF I have previously written on this subject, I make no apology for returning to it. A man is constantly led to think of it anew by fresh observation, and a small experience of mine in the North lately has suggested one or two ideas.

In the first place, we must not make the mistake of thinking that the smooth, easy, vegetating life is the best. It may be so in the negative sense. By its very definition it is freed from the higher pains and pangs. But then with these it misses the greater, rarer ecstasies that reveal the possibilities of the soul. Is it true to say that

One crowded year of glorious life  
Is worth an age without a name?

It may be true. The remembrance of a brief grand blessedness may be sweeter and more



## *The Happy Life*



precious than years upon years of quiet, uninterrupted content. There is a content which it is possible to enjoy by suppressing capacity, by ceasing from thought, from interest, from effort, from ambition—the content that comes to those who are perfectly satisfied if they can eat comfortably and sleep comfortably, and escape disturbance. But even without Christianity man was noble enough to discover that this was unworthy. In his remarkable essay on the Ancient Stoics, Sir Alexander Grant rightly lays stress on the profound truth which Seneca perceived—the truth, namely, that the mind and the will evoked into consciousness, and provoked even by suffering, are a greater possession than the blessings, if they were attainable, of a so-called golden age and state of nature. The old picture of mankind in a state of innocence, dwelling together in some far-off island, where every impulse was virtuous and every impulse was to be obeyed, was rejected by the Stoics. They said that in these primitive times there was, in fact, no wisdom. If men did wise things, they did them unconsciously. They had not even virtue ;



## *The Happy Life*



neither justice, nor prudence, nor temperance, nor fortitude. Seneca railed at the actual state of the world, but he saw that the remedy was placed rather in the power of the will, in the effort to progress, than in dreams of a bygone state of innocence. Amongst modern writers the most powerful exponent of this view, so far as I know, is Mrs. Oliphant. The burden of all her teaching is that it is infinitely better to live rather than to exist, even though life may bring its full tale of agonies and failures and regrets. She, too, had her own sharp sufferings, and perhaps at last her indomitable spirit yielded and she felt it was good to die. Yet to the last she held to it unwaveringly that these sufferings had been good for her, that blessings had come with them and after them, and that they had awakened in her thoughts and feelings which it was good to have aroused, thoughts and feelings which to leave dormant would have been to impair vitality. It is not wise, it is not right that we should be willing to contract and deaden our natures, to see them shrink, dwindle, draw themselves within meaner lines every day, simply because their



## *The Happy Life*



development is accomplished at the cost of inevitable and even, it may be, very sharp sorrows.

In the second place, there can be no doubt that the way to happiness can only be found if it is not deliberately sought. To seek happiness is almost always to miss it. Always in the long run there is something higher, nearer, and more commanding than our own happiness. There are the claims of duty and of love. I do not know whether, for practical purposes, we can express it better than by saying that we ought to seek in the first place the happiness of others; and, as has been finely said, we shall discover that, if we bring happiness into the lives of other people, we shall not be able to keep it out of our own. This is true, and yet it is a truth that surely needs most careful guarding. I have often seen it explained in the wrong way. It does not mean that we are to make other people happy by indulging them, by flattering them, by helping them to the things that they wish. Human nature being what it is, this is impossible, for as a matter of fact, most of us are injured by flattery. We



## *The Happy Life*



are not injured but benefited by the honest commendation of what we have honestly done. But we are injured by all eulogy which has not been earned. Neither is it good for grown-up people, any more than for children, that they should be indulged. From a friend one expects a kind interpretation of our actions, a generous allowance for our failures; but he is no true friend who encourages us in a wrong course of action, and makes us believe that we are upon the right track, when in reality we have greatly erred. No, the way to make others happy is to serve them, to give them all the help in our power, to develop their best, to believe in them, to encourage them when they are taking their slow and difficult steps upward, and to warn them when they are deliberately choosing the poorer and baser way. They may not like the warning, but there are occasions when it ought to be given, and when to be silent is to betray the obligations of friendship. Everybody can see this in the case of children, unless perhaps some parents in the case of their own children. It is cruel to allow a child to have what it wishes, to go on with a will



## *The Happy Life*



unchecked till it becomes almost too strong for checking. It is the business of a wise parent gently to repress, to teach, to correct, to discourage as well as to encourage and praise. So the man or woman who goes grinning about the world and prophesying smooth things may earn a certain worthless kind of popularity, but can never receive the highest guerdon of friendship and of love. To "truth it in love," as the Apostle Paul says, is the highest possible service we can render to another.

Compare two lives. In the one life a man sets himself to enjoy what is best, to see the best and to know it, to have all the pleasurable experiences that are within his range, to experience the delights of stimulating conversation, to let out the hours of each day to his own advantage. Another turns his back upon such things. He fulfils his daily task, and in the hours that are at his own disposal he seeks to uplift the wretched and the poor. You look at his life and you can see how impoverished and stunted it has been on many sides. You observe how as the years pass this voluntary work of his assumes greater and greater pro-



## The Happy Life



portions in his mind. He begins to be more absorbed with it even than with his business. Though he does the allotted work well, his heart is elsewhere. I should like you to take the two lives and compare them at seventy. You will then find which has been the best and the most rewarding, which has stored up most sunshine in the passing. The first as the end draws near is apt to be weary. The best wine has been drunk, the familiar faces have vanished or grown rebuking and old, a few poor japes are all that remain out of the brilliant conversation. The other is peaceful, with a mellow light lying over it, and not without some humble assurance that it has not been lived altogether in vain.

But you say the highest life is neither of these. The highest life must of necessity bear upon it the print of the nails. There must be sacrifice in it. In that curious book, now apparently forgotten, Renan's *Philosophical Dialogues*, there is a noteworthy passage on immortality: "As for myself, I do not precisely claim immortality; but I should like two things—first, that my sacrifices to goodness and to





## *The Happy Life*



truth should not have been offered up to blank and empty space. (I do not want to be repaid for them, but I want them to fulfil some purpose.) And secondly, that what little I have done should meet with somebody's acknowledgment. I want God's esteem, nothing more. This is exorbitant, is it? Do we reproach the dying soldier with taking an interest in the issue of the battle, and wishing to know whether his general-in-chief is pleased with him?" One of Renan's sharpest critics found great fault with him for this. He said that Renan had no right to speak of well-doing as a sacrifice. He adds that, when we perform an act of justice to our own detriment, we sacrifice something, but not the self proper, because the self proper, the higher nature, was on the contrary indulged. Why, then, should it claim as a reward for its indulgence a second gratification in consideration for the first? The individual might as well claim to be repaid in heaven for the steaks which he consumed on earth, on the score that their purchase involved a pecuniary sacrifice. This is ingenious, but it will not bear examination. If the higher nature were sole in



## *The Happy Life*



us, things would be very much more simple. If we were pure spirits, and not flesh and blood also, then things would be simpler still. But these are not the facts, and the facts being what they are, it remains that, in the highest life, there must be an element of sacrifice. It is true, however, that a great deal that is called sacrifice does not in the very least deserve the name, and the man to whom all well-doing is sacrifice may wisely tremble for the supremacy of his nobler self.

## XXII

### *The Man in the Street*

I HAVE lately come to know "The Man in the Street." He is, let it be understood, an individual with a name, a surname, and an address in London. There are any number of men in the street; but this one, I am convinced, is typical of all. When you understand him, you understand the rest. When you hear his judgment, you may be sure that he is speaking for at least a million. In order properly to get at his mind, you should talk to him on his native heath. My last interview with him was in the study where I am writing, and he was less vocal than he would have been in his proper element. In Trollope's excellent story, *The Small House at Allington*, we are told that the heroine would never interview Hopkins, the gardener, without alluring him out of his own domain into the overawing neighbourhood of chairs and tables.



## *The Man in the Street*



"I always like," said Lily, "to get him into the house, because he feels a little abashed by the chairs and tables, or perhaps it is the carpet that is too much for him. Out on the gravelled walks he is such a terrible tyrant, and in the greenhouse he almost tramples on one." But the man in the street talks best in the street.

"The Man in the Street" is a pure Cockney, born within the sound of Bow Bells. He had a rough time in his youth—a poor education at a cheap, cruel little school, and an early and bitter apprenticeship. All this made him thoroughly familiar with the streets of London. He became sharp, ingenious, and resourceful. By patient diligence he has now reached a fairly good position, though the nature of his work keeps him very much in the street still. There is little in London that he does not know. He has spoken in his time to people of every kind. His eyes and his ears have been thoroughly trained, and he is by no means a person to be despised.

The first thing to say about "The Man in the Street" is that material interests hold by far the first place in his mind. He has lived all his days,



## *The Man in the Street*



and is living to-day, in an atmosphere of continual and remorseless competition. He knows very well that, if he makes a stumble, he will be immediately trampled down. He knows that he cannot afford to miss a single chance; he is holding on, as it were, by the nails. There are very few businesses in London nowadays that can be left to themselves for a single week. New enterprises, new energy, new ideas, must be put into them constantly, else they will soon disappear. "The Man in the Street" is no whiner. When misfortunes come he is calmly composed. He takes his reverses like a man, and does not complain. When he succeeds, unless the success be on a great scale, he does not boast. He is aware of the mixture of good and evil in life, and tries to keep an equal mind. In this he is much helped by a curious but keen sense of humour. His humour has a sardonic turn about it; but, such as it is, it fortifies him. He thoroughly enjoys London—the crowded streets, the rush of business—and would be miserable in the country. Philosophical, full of mother wit, he gets through his life, day by day, patiently putting up with a thousand rebuffs, and keeping



## *The Man in the Street*



his head above water to the last, besides paying premiums to make a provision for his family when he dies.

“The Man in the Street” has a great and quiet belief in his country. He is deeply moved by our reverses and trials: he may condemn the Government and the officers; but he is lenient and says little. He knows too well how many of his own careful plans have failed, to be hard on others who have not succeeded. He is fully determined on seeing the war through, and if it were of any use he would go out himself and expose his life in defence of his country. What is gnawing at his heart, though he says little about it, is the apprehension of what is going to happen to his business during the next six months or so. His thoughts of the economies he can effect have made another wrinkle on his brow. But he has no fear of defeat, and would go on to the last sixpence and the last drop of blood before he would yield. Foreign nations, he thinks, completely fail to understand the English mind—slow to move and hardened by threats and dangers to the temper of steel. “The Man in the Street” is quietly but intensely



## *The Man in the Street*



and affectionately loyal. He worships Queen Alexandra, thinks the King is a good fellow, and detests attacks on the Royal Family.

In politics, "The Man in the Street" is a Conservative. He used to hate Socialism, but he now despises it. He has a firm conviction that trade is a great thing, and that trade is not good when the Liberals are in power. His favourite statesman is Lord Salisbury. Next to him comes Lord Rosebery. To Home Rule, "The Man in the Street" is so immovably opposed that you cannot get him to discuss it. He simply shakes his head, as if it were criminal for intelligent persons to talk of such a thing. He thinks that Mr. Gladstone was a wonderful man, but he never believed in him. He likes neither the London School Board nor the London County Council. He is firmly convinced that children are in many cases much over-educated, and that, if they want extra education, their parents should pay for it. Many measures have been passed in his name which he has not approved of, and he would be glad to see them rescinded, though he will not move that way unless the real leader of men calls him.



## *The Man in the Street*



"The Man in the Street" is not an enthusiast. Life has dealt him many blows, and he does not expect much from it. Being in the street and at work, he is little at home. He approves of marriage as the best thing for a man, but he is by no means enthusiastic on the subject. He is made to feel every day the responsibilities of a wife and children. I am afraid that he is not religious, although he may have a religion of his own. It is certain at least that he disapproves of an aggressive irreligion. Parsons, as he calls them, he especially and particularly despises and distrusts. The scorn with which he regards their discussions about incense and vestments is too great for him to express. But I fear he goes further than that, and thinks them hypocrites. He very rarely goes to church, and never of his own will. In business he dislikes religious people extremely, and would much rather deal with those who make no profession of being better than other people.

In the matter of amusements, "The Man in the Street" prefers the music-hall. He likes variety, and enjoys the privilege of smoking, and it means much to him that no great demand is made upon





## *The Man in the Street*



his attention. I think he very rarely reads books. Mr. Jerome attracted him some years ago, and he was particularly entertained by *Three Men in a Boat*. He knows Rudyard Kipling's name very well, and likes his music-hall ditties, but he has never read any book by Kipling, though he may have tried to. On the other hand he is a diligent reader of newspapers. Till lately his favourite journal was the *Daily Telegraph*. Nowadays he reads also the *Daily Mail*. He reads the evening papers, the *Star*, the *Evening News*, the *Echo*, and the *Sun*; and sometimes, though rarely, he will buy a copy of the *Globe* or the *Westminster Gazette*.

On the whole, it is not easy to judge "The Man in the Street." You find, when you get to know him, that he cheerfully pinches himself for wife and children, and that the dearest of all to him in the whole world is a little cripple daughter. He may be seen at the end of a hard day buying a toy to make the child's heart glad. He can appreciate real kindness of nature, and in his heart he loves disinterestedness. I remember long ago reading, in an old newspaper, an account of the way in



## *The Man in the Street*



---

which a London crowd showed its admiration of Garibaldi. "The Man in the Street" by the nature of his life becomes cautious, observant, reticent, and even hard to appearance, but I believe when you get at his heart that you find him patient, constant, and latently generous and affectionate. His indomitable courage and tenacity the world may yet come to know.

## XXIII

### *The Zest of Life*

WHEN I have a little holiday I like to read biographies. It is good in the brief pauses of life to bethink one's self—to consider the drift and the end. A true life story helps you to do this. It happened this Easter that I found, in the circulating library, Julian Hawthorne's strange book on his father and mother, entitled *Nathaniel Hawthorne and his Wife*. I had read it years ago twice at least, and very carefully, and was ashamed to find how new it was—new, I mean, not in the details, but in the general conception of the whole. The ideal biography should begin with a very clear chronological table, showing at a glance how the life was divided. For want of this we misconceive—we do not see how events are spread about or crowded together in a space of years. I think I have read as much of Hawthorne, and



## *The Zest of Life*



as much about him, as most people. But somehow it never occurred to me to think how his life was parted. I was rather inclined to agree with Henry James, whose opinion is quoted approvingly by Professor Seeley, that Hawthorne was a comfortable, prosperous person, and anything but an unromantic visionary. The facts are against this. Mr. Julian Hawthorne's book contains things that should never have been printed by a son, or even by a friend. But it masses the life, so to speak, rightly, and gives both a painful impression and a salutary lesson.

It is surely a great thing to keep up the zest of life. Life is nothing if it loses interest. It was once said by a shrewd critic of good old Dr. Adam Clarke, the commentator, that his heart to the last leapt up when he beheld a rainbow in the sky. So his grey hairs and his many years were to be coveted. Not so the days of which it has to be said that there is no pleasure in them.

Now, the peculiar thing about Hawthorne is that, years before he died, he completely lost the zest of life. He was only sixty when he passed away. He had apparently everything to



## *The Zest of Life*



make him happy—the fullest domestic content, a splendid fame, a clear conscience, many warm friends, leisure, competence, and unimpaired powers. He had retired with his wife and children to the home of his own choosing at Concord. He did not wish to leave it, he had no definite complaint to make, and yet years before the end he began to pine away in hopeless dejection. His wife, who adored him, cleverly contrived that he should go to the seaside with his son, and she writes him in this significant way: “I do not know how to impress you with adequate force concerning the absolutely inspiring effect of your absence! I have been weighed to the earth by my sense of your depressed energies and spirits, in a way from which I tried in vain to rally. I could not sit in the house and think about it, and so I kept as much as possible at work. Of all trials this is the heaviest to me—to see you so apathetic, so indifferent, so hopeless, so unstrung.” This went on and grew worse and worse. He no longer seemed to find any sufficient interest in life. “I have been,” he wrote to his friend Stoddard, “a happy man,



## *The Zest of Life*



and yet I do not remember any one moment of such happy conspiring circumstances that I could have rung a joy bell at it." This went on and on till at last Hawthorne was induced to go away with his devoted friend Pierce, and the end came peacefully.

How is this to be explained? Not by illness. Illness is not necessarily depressing. It is depressing when it takes away the strength needed to fulfil a trust faithfully. Let the burden of that trust be lifted, and the heart leaps up. I admit that certain forms of illness do lead to melancholy, and perhaps Hawthorne's time in Rome may have injured him; but there is no evidence. It was not any sense of failure, for Hawthorne was quite aware of his own greatness, and coveted no man's laurels. It was most assuredly no disappointment of the affections, for Hawthorne's whole heart went out to his own, as theirs to his. What then was the reason of this failure to rejoice in the wonder and bloom of the world, in the richness of God's special gifts to him?

My theory is that it came from a sunless youth. Let us look at the facts. Hawthorne lived some



sixty years. Of these thirty-eight were spent in loneliness, in obscurity, and in poverty. I have been in Salem, I know the surroundings of his childhood ; but one must understand the intense gloom of all that was nearest him to feel how it must have weighed on a sensitive spirit. Hawthorne could not have been conscious of his own genius ; but in eager America every one went ahead, and he made no progress year after year, till Sophia Peabody came his way, and life lightened. The day was far spent when he married her. Thirty-eight out of his sixty years were gone. He was forty-six when he wrote *The Scarlet Letter*, and won his great triumph. It is curious to note that the books on which his fame rests were written between this and his fiftieth year—roughly speaking, in three years. He then had his time of fame, was in England and in Rome, saw much and was made much of, and had a little pleasure doubtless for a few years. Then he came back to sink into despondency and die. I think his best years were those after his marriage, when he drudged in anxious, happy poverty at the Salem Custom House.

The moral is that childhood and youth should



## *The Zest of Life*



be made happy as far as possible. Armed with the memory and experience of happy years, a man may meet with unimpaired strength the trials that are sure to come. Break his spirit by sunlessness and suppression at the beginning, and he loses the power to resist, the power to enjoy. Only the power of suffering remains—and sometimes the power to die.

I find in Dr. Bain's "Mental and Moral Science," a book which is full of just and acute observations on human life and conduct, the following passage :—"The happiness of our later life is in great part made up of the pleasurable memories of early years. The early period of life, so favourable to acquirement generally, is adapted to the storing up of pleasures and pains. The same pleasure happening in youth and in middle age will not be equally remembered as a cheering association in advanced life. The joys of early years have thus an additional value. A pinched, severe, and ascetic bringing up will surely depress the tone of the whole future life ; scarcely any amount of subsequent good fortune will suffice to redress the waste."



## XXIV

### Good Manners

THE other afternoon I had a chance of meeting a man whose name is at present on every one's lips. I came to the conclusion that he was the finest specimen I had ever seen of the thorough-bred English gentleman. This suggested some thoughts on a subject, which in the eighteenth century was the favourite theme of moralists, but is now considerably neglected. I refer to the question of good manners.

Good manners must spring from a certain inner fountain of truth and honour and tenderness. This is the beginning, and this is the end. To a certain extent, and even to a very large extent, good manners are learned from converse with good society, and it may be that even manuals of etiquette have their uses. But it is easy to prove that something more is needed. Dr. Johnson has described for us a



## Good Manners



manner of perfect address : " I soon discovered that he possessed some signs of graciousness and attraction, which books had not taught ; . . . that he had the power of obliging those whom he did not benefit ; that he diffused upon his cursory behaviour and most trifling actions a gloss of softness and delicacy, by which every one was dazzled ; and that, by some occult method of captivation, he animated the timorous, softened the supercilious, and opened the reserved. I could not but repine at the inelegance of my own manners, which left me no hopes but not to offend, and at the inefficacy of rustic benevolence, which gained no friends but by real service." But it does not follow that a man who shines in company and among his equals necessarily possesses good manners. The test is that he should be courteous to all ; courteous to his equals, to those above him, and to those beneath him ; courteous in society, and equally courteous in his own home circle. Whatever is artificial, whatever is not part of the very nature, will break and fail at a point of strain. Often it happens that men are charming in society and bores at home. Some-



## Good Manners



times a man shines among his own people, and is overbearing and irritable in the outer world. It was so with the great Earl of Chatham, who neither won the personal regard of his Sovereign, nor conciliated the good-will of the House of Commons. When he failed at last to brow-beat his colleagues, he hastily threw up the seals of office and retired into private life. He had the excuse of bodily ailment, for he was racked by gout and suffered severely from breathlessness. Yet at home he was the most amiable of men, loving his wife and doting upon his children. It was well, but it was not enough. I have seen it said by no contemptible authority that, in order to have good manners, a man must be in a position where favours can be conferred. He ought to feel that he can oblige others. This induces a certain graciousness which comes naturally only to such an one. I do not believe this in the very least. There is no one so poor that he cannot do a kindness. The highest and the firmest are subject to the power of a kind word or an unkind. In P. S. Worsley's translation of the *Odyssey*, in some respects the most



## Good Manners



delightful of the translations, there is a perfect line which is also a perfect rendering, "Love can make a little gift excel." Some of the finest examples of courtesy may be found among the humblest, though I fully recognise that some races have a certain natural grace, which may be admired and envied, but which it is hard to imitate. Once more, an essential condition of good manners is sincerity; and that takes us back to the fountain. A man should have nothing to hide; he should have no pretence to make; he should never affect to be what he is not, or to know when he is ignorant. The least suspicion of falsehood or concealment will undo the manner. Miss Austen acutely notes that Emma could tell when Mr. Knightly came to a dinner party in a shabby conveyance. He was flustered by the consciousness that he had done something beneath his position in the world.

An essential condition of the perfect manner is the absence of self-consciousness. There is a kind of self-consciousness that is most excusable, and sometimes pretty and attracting. It is the shyness of the young. This often



## Good Manners



comes from the feeling that they are not understood, and that they have not the means of making themselves understood. They do not possess, or at least they do not know how to handle, the weapons of society. Sometimes it has a less worthy source. It springs from a great egotism. Still, on the whole, the charitable view may wisely be taken, provided the shyness does not last too long. Young people should be quick enough to see that their elders are not scrutinising them and judging them, as they imagine. Elderly people who retain their shyness are, as a rule, distinctly disagreeable. When great personages, who have been unpopular through life, on account of their rude, brusque manners, pass away, the newspapers explain that they meant very well, but that they were shy. These explanations are seldom felt to be satisfactory. Egotism is inconsistent with good manners. I need hardly say that a person who is always thinking about etiquette is sure to make blunders, and to convey an impression of vulgarity. The true gentleman is infinitely above such paltriness. He is not thinking about himself; he is thinking about



## Good Manners



others. He is not miserably comparing his station and his fortune with those of the people he meets. He meets them as a gentleman meets ladies and gentlemen, and his business is to give and receive what pleasure he can.

Sometimes, in company, it is one's business to give, and more frequently it is one's business to receive. For example, there are certain occasions on which a well-bred man will find it his duty to talk. He is among a circle of tongue-tied people. His hostess is uneasy, and feels that things are not going well. There is little talk, and that little is forced and artificial. Then good manners prescribe the duty of speech, of an endeavour to thaw the frosty atmosphere. No doubt this is difficult. I have a friend who is certainly not loquacious, and is conscious of this fact. He once visited New Orleans, and was greatly impressed by the cemeteries there. It occurred to him that, at any pause in conversation, he would skilfully lead up to and introduce a description of the cemeteries in New Orleans. Wonderful as these cemeteries are, I am afraid they became more and more wonderful every time he pictured them. One night



## Good Manners



he thought himself peculiarly successful in talking about them to his neighbour at dinner. She heard him out, and then responded with the fearful words, "I was born and brought up in New Orleans." Since then I believe my friend has declined all invitations to dinner parties, but he is on the verge of another and, I trust, safer theme. I have often wondered whether the best talk comes in dialogue or in a small circle of congenial spirits, but I have never asked whether it comes in a society, where some are strangers and others very nearly strangers. For my part, I agree with Bulwer Lytton, who says somewhere that in a circle of friends there is a temptation to attempt cleverness, and that the worst talk is always that which tries to be clever. "Even in the talk of Dr. Johnson, as recorded by Boswell, the finest things are those which he said to Boswell when nobody was by, and which he could just as well have said in the Hebrides." Still, something may be done by a kind-hearted man who is not stupid, even in a mixed company. For one thing, he may listen when the talk has made some commencement. It is astonishing how men, otherwise



## Good Manners



virtuous, fail in the art of listening. A public speaker can succeed only if his audience attend. If they rudely interrupt, he cannot do himself justice. In a hushed and eager audience he finds himself, and often is stimulated to say things, above his natural level. So it is in talk. If you have a good listener, if you are sure that you are being attended to with interest, and that you will be allowed to finish, even very commonplace talkers will sensibly brighten. A wise man has said that to appear well pleased with those you are engaged with is the secret of social success.

It is an essential of good manners that they should always be maintained. Who are the worst-liked people in the world? Not, I think, those who are persistently rough and discourteous. They often get the credit of very kind hearts beneath their outward harshness. The people who are thoroughly detested are the people who at one time treat you with effusive civility, and at another meet you with a cold stare. Such people are easily discovered, but apparently they cannot discover themselves; and I think it may be said that however numerous their





## Good Manners



acquaintances may be, they have no friends. I do not say that we can always be quite the same. Moods and feelings come and go, even in the strongest. One day you are well and bright; another day you are ill and in pain. It is perhaps impossible to be just the same in one condition as in another, and I fancy, for most of us, the safe rule in days of mental or physical suffering is to say as little as possible, and to keep as much as may be out of other people's way. Still, we can do our best. We should try to be constant in our ways. If we have taken what we think reasonable offence at the doings of a friend, we ought not to show it by an icy manner. It is our business to explain to our friend where he has apparently come short, and to hear what he says about it. In all probability with his explanation the misunderstanding will pass like a summer cloud.

It ought not to be necessary to say that good manners forbid all allusions to disagreeable subjects. And yet it is wonderful how this rule is transgressed and forgotten, by men and women who would be very much insulted if they were accused of vulgarity. Want of



## Good Manners



sympathy is vulgarity. If a man has undergone a great and humiliating reverse, nobody but a boor would talk of it while the thing was fresh. Of course, this does not mean that an intimate friend should not speak of it. I am speaking of general society. But even after the misfortune is years old, even after the sharp sting of it has ceased, it ought not to be touched. It is wonderful how an inconsiderate word will give life to past sorrows and mortifications. "You are looking very ill to-day." I have known a remark of that kind, made of a morning in a railway train, sicken the heart of a City man through all the long day. Young people are gloriously insolent in the way they sometimes talk about age. They will refer to a man of sixty as an old man, when there are men and women in the room well over sixty, but unwilling to admit they are old. These things appear trivial, and I know there are many of us who do not mind in the least if they are told that they are looking old or looking ill, or that an abusive article about them has appeared in a newspaper. But that is not the point. Dr. Johnson once said to



## Good Manners



Topham Beauclerk that he had never been pained by anything he said to him, but he had often been pained by seeing his intention to give pain. And it must be remembered that the comfort of life turns very much upon small things. There is a pleasant sense of safety in the company of some people. You know they will not say anything to fret and chafe you. In the company of other people you are sure to receive a wound, and no wonder you should shun that company. In the old days the people of Nantucket had an enjoyment which they called Squantum. A party of ladies and gentlemen went to one of the famous watering-places and had a happy day together. The principal rules were that no one was to speak of disagreeable affairs, no one was to take offence at a joke, and every one was expected to do his and her part towards creating a general laugh. "Care is thrown to the wind, politics discarded, war ignored, pride humbled, stations levelled, wealth scorned, virtue exalted, and—this was Squantum."

Great discrimination should be shown in asking questions. There is one way of asking questions



## Good Manners



which is the height of good manners ; another way which is the height of bad manners. To draw out shy and reticent persons, and to enable them to bring out the best that is in them, is an act of grand courtesy ; and very frequently this can only be accomplished by asking them questions. They have one subject on which they can dilate to the advantage of their hearers, but they have not the art of bringing in this subject skilfully, and so they pass often a dull, unhappy evening. All they need is a chance. Often, however, the asking of questions may be grossly offensive. There are people who will ask you the amount of your income ; they will ask you to give your opinion on people you do not care to speak of, and so on through all the varieties of impoliteness. In order to ask questions well you must have a genuine interest in the answer—I should almost say a genuine interest in the people to whom you are speaking. Any feigned interest is sure to be discovered.

And this brings me to my last remark. For good manners it is necessary to consider and to remember. A lady, let us suppose, is happy in the possession of a little daughter. A



## Good Manners



gentleman visits her home, and is introduced to the child. He meets his hostess some months after and asks with great effusiveness, "How is the son and heir?" There is worse than that. I have known people ask about the health of a little child who was dead—who had taken much sunshine with her. Such want of thought is almost indistinguishable from brutality. But if you seek information from people you must try to remember it, not ask it over again. It is an unmistakable sign of vulgarity not to remember accurately the names of your friends and acquaintances. It is not good to misspell their names; it is not good to ask them the same questions each time you meet them. Tact does more to smooth life than other qualities that are highly esteemed, and tact is very much a matter of thoughtfulness and recollection. So we end at the beginning. There must be the fountain for good manners. All veneering will come off; but the soul that is gentle, sympathetic, faithful, and pitiful, will reveal itself unconsciously in all its intercourse with the world.

I am not preaching a sermon, but one's mind returns to St. Paul's great chapter on



## Good Manners



---

Charity, and to the *Imitation of Christ*, of which Fontenelle's fine eulogy may be recalled : "The most beautiful book that ever came from the hand of man, since not from his hands came the Gospel."

## XXV

### *On Growing Old*

PEOPLE who write about growing old do not, as a rule, take the theme very seriously. They talk about it and joke about it, and expect to be met by pleasant disclaimers, and even to be told that they are younger, and looking younger, than ever. Though middle-age has its drawbacks and burdens, and though its burdens are growing heavier in these days, it has its pleasures too, in a fairly successful life. A middle-aged man who has had good fortune begins at a certain stage of his progress to be aware of it. He is consulted on weighty subjects ; he may be asked to discharge honourable functions or to occupy important positions. Such honours do not elate him, but looking back on an obscure and struggling life, he sees that he has come nearer the realisation of his hopes than he ever anticipated in any sober moment. A certain deference is paid to him ; he



## *On Growing Old*



finds that his name is known where he did not expect it to be known. Besides, the years have taught him the power of discriminating. He comes to know that complete victory, ecstatic and unbroken bliss, or great fortune, are things either impossible of realisation, or, to say the least, realised by a very few. He tries to "see life steadily, and see it whole," and in a measure he succeeds. By the way, Matthew Arnold was advised by an impertinent critic to take his own prescription when he lamented that there were so many Philistines in the world, and so few people who knew even as much as he did about Celtic poetry. But when men are unpleasantly reminded that they are really on the verge of old age, they do not play with the thought. It is constantly with them, and they are afraid to speak of it. They try to postpone the period, to reassure themselves from the statistics that life is growing longer, to recall and bring into view the instances of men much older than they, who have held high posts in defiance of all competitors. There are people who like to think that they are growing old, but as a rule they are fortunately placed. They have a competency, they have occupations





## On Growing Old



which they long to take up. They have friends, and they have a fair measure of health. What they hope to do is to escape from their present way of living and begin a new way—a way so new that it will be almost equivalent to a new life.

Why do people shrink from the thought of growing old? First among the reasons I should put the fear of want. Among literary men very few have succeeded in saving enough to live upon in comfort. Very many have been able to save nothing. They know that under modern conditions every year makes their present income more precarious, and the mental misery caused by these thoughts is perhaps the most acute in human experience. It is of no use to laugh at it, and very little use to reason with it. In *A Window in Thrums* Mr. Barrie tells us of Jimsy Duthie, who gave thirty years of his life to the writing and printing of "*The Millennium: an Epic Poem in Twelve Books*, by James Duthie." Jimsy had saved £100, and when he was neither able to work nor to live alone, his friends cast about for a home for his few remaining years. He was very spent and feeble, yet he had the



## *On Growing Old*



fear that he might be still alive when all his money was gone. After that was the workhouse. He covered sheets of paper with calculations about how long the £100 would last, if he gave away for board and lodging ten shillings, nine shillings, seven and sixpence a week. At last, with sore misgiving, he went to live with a family, who took him for eight shillings. Less than a month afterwards he died. But how was he to know that he was to die so soon? "What will become of my wife and children when I am gone, or when I am out of work?" is a question which multitudes brood over till they are nearly insane. Yet it may very well be argued that there are worse things in life than the want of money. Perhaps, but almost every one can realise the meaning of poverty. Almost every one has had at one time or another the experience of actual pecuniary pressure. People with the power of imagining are happily not very numerous. The exercise of the imagination is not needed when the evils of poverty have to be realised. It has been suggested that there is another cause for the dreary eminence which want of money occupies among the woes of humanity. It is often attributed to injustice on



## *On Growing Old*



the part of men, and it is often caused by the harshness of an employer or by the treachery of a friend. The human mind rages against injustice, especially if it is prolonged and irremediable. When afflictions more dire than poverty come, they seem often to proceed directly from a higher power, and they are therefore more easily acquiesced in. They may be submitted to in a spirit of religious faith, or they may be accepted as the sentence of that fate against which all appeal is vain. I do not need to labour this point. Any one may see how little the ordinary man can afford to talk about growing old.

(2) Another great reason for the dislike of old age is the mortification it often inflicts on vanity. Honour, love, obedience are the fit accompaniments of old age, but old age often looks round and finds that they are not there. The young have the upper hand, and the man who for many years has been successful, who has been deferred to, and has had as much of his own way as it is good for a human being to have, suddenly finds that no value is set on his opinions. He is perhaps not consulted, or, if he is consulted, his views are quietly set aside. He is made to feel that younger



## *On Growing Old*



men regard him as an old fogey, superfluous on the stage, who ought to be cultivating his garden instead of interfering with important affairs. It is pathetic to see how, after the weight of years is heavy, many men still struggle to maintain their place, and are pained even more by the courtesy than by the rudeness of their juniors. They are treated as if they were children, and they know it. They see others pressing to the front while they themselves are civilly, inexorably driven to the background. I have not a great deal of sympathy for them. A man should be content if he has had his day, and the day does not stretch over all the years of a long lifetime. There are men who are not at all troubled, but rather relieved, when they realise that their responsibilities are falling away from them. They have always disliked responsibility. They have continued to bear it, because it was their duty ; but they have been ever ready to welcome an honourable dismissal. If the old man who has done his best work will himself be the first to recognise the fact, he will save himself many troubles and heartaches, and reap rich reward.

(3) There are many who have done well in



## On Growing Old



business, and can retire whenever they please to live comfortably upon their means. What restrains them in most cases is the dread of *ennui*. Mr. C. F. Keary in his little book, *A Wanderer*, makes his hero say of his work, "Let us leave it behind as soon as may be. If you can save half your income, then in a limited number of years—many, perhaps, but still a limited number—you will have acquired an annuity equal to your usual expenditure, and can be (oh, heaven!) *free*—free as air, free as ourselves who write these lines. All the labour is kept up in the hope of the hour of freedom, of the lifting of the weight, of the shaking off the dust which years have accumulated upon heart and brain." But the rich business man, in most cases, has loved his work and found his life in it. It is not for the sake of money that he pursues it now. It is simply because he likes it. He has had little time or thought for anything else. He is not cultivated, not a lover of books, not able to shine in society, but he knows his own work, and he can talk about it with those who also know it, and enjoy himself. He has a dread of the time when he will have nothing to do. It must be owned that he has



## On Growing Old



much reason on his side. *Ennui*, in the full sense of the word, is one of the most terrible things that can befall a man. One need not go to the extreme of the Parisians before the siege, whose whole aim it was to make the hours of the day fly round like wheel spokes, of which neither the form nor tint could be discovered, who regarded it as the chief end of man to contrive that he should never know what it was to be bored. The real way of fighting *ennui* is to work in one way or another. The dreary, passionless lassitude which settles down upon those who have nothing to do, and are without resources, is apt to end in despair and madness and suicide. The simple want of interest in life explains many deaths. Some well-meaning theorists dream of a world without faith and without work. Such a world, if it ever existed, would have but two outlets—the plunge into debauchery and the plunge into utter despair. A wise man ought to provide interests outside his daily work to which he can betake himself when his strength decays. I should like very much to retire, but if I did I should wish to have a fresh start, to go and live in a new country, learn a new language, study a



## *On Growing Old*



new literature. I cannot understand how the life quite without occupation should be other than a miserable and unbearable thing.

(4) Another fear of old age is the loss of friendship. In their dependence on friends, human beings differ very much. It was said of the man who read perhaps more books than any other man of his generation, that he never was known to read a book twice. He had no favourites, and in the same way he had no close friends. He was courteous and accessible, and able to give a measure of good-will to all good people he met, and he could give no more. Others, again, have a few friends, and when they lose them they are not able to replace them. As the years pass we must grow solitary unless we can make new friends, and the old can make them if they will. They ought to choose, if possible, men younger than themselves; and I think, as they rule, they do so. The new friend cannot share with you the experiences of the past, but, in spite of that, he may do very much to enrich your life. Old men, with rare exceptions, have had to face the bitterest bereavements; and these bereavements do sometimes



## *On Growing Old*



leave a most bitter, unalterable, unending, and even savage sense of hunger which continually bites the heart. But far more often the stinging sorrow becomes a sacred, peaceful joy to those who are "sure of a meeting." And for most of us there is a young life springing round us in which we look to have the best happiness of the remaining years.

(5) Another terror of old age is the weakening of intellectual faculties. This is apt to show itself in the inaccessibility of the mind, not to new facts, but to new ideas. An old business man will go on enlarging his business. What he finds very difficult to comprehend is that the way in which he has done business successfully is no longer the right way. It is so with military men. The Duke of Wellington showed it in his old age, and even Von Moltke, though he never failed in strategy, could not understand the alteration of the system of discipline. Politicians show it most markedly. Thiers was a conspicuous example in his old age. He could take in facts as well as in his youth, but no vivifying thought could break its way into his mind. Lord Palmerston owned this weakness in regard to





scientific truth, and any one may see it among old theologians. They lose the acuteness of their sensibility to the atmosphere round them. But one of the best examples I know of is Sainte Beuve's essay on the writings of Prévost Paradol, who, of course, was much his junior. The great critic was irritated by Prévost Paradol's notions about parliamentary government and democracy, and the impossibility of the old state of things. Sainte Beuve was thoroughly satisfied with the Second Empire, and did not see but that it would last. Prévost Paradol seemed to him to be a young man destroying himself, in the vain attempt to do what so many had failed in doing. Yes, but the Second Empire did not last. Old men, and for that matter middle-aged men and young men, are always in the same danger. They think that things will go on much as they are; but the leader of the future knows that they will not go on, that they will all be changed within fifteen years, and it is this knowledge that gives him the power to change them.

I will not say much about the fear of physical suffering in old age, a fear not much spoken of, but very present to some. Even if it comes, it



## *On Growing Old*



is by no means fatal to happiness. I have seen close at hand for years human lives gradually being consumed by one of the most terrible of maladies, and yet with many intervals of brightness, with many hopes and consolations. If one were asked what blessing he would most desire, the readiest answer would be, "Perfect health"; and yet I doubt whether on reflection this would be the choice of the wise man. The man who is always in perfect health is ignorant of many things which it is well to know. The thought should not be suffered to rest over-much on what may be between us and the new beginning. "He has won awa'" — a Scotch phrase for one who has gone through the struggle — says all that need be said.

## XXVI

### Broken-Hearted

WE know that great sorrows sometimes kill ; we know that in many cases they leave their mark on the whole succeeding life, even though the heart that was broken at the time may be more or less handsomely pieced together, and a measure of happiness may remain. The question is whether there are sorrows that have no cure, wounds that do not cease to bleed till they are stanchèd in death. One of the wisest commentators on human life—La Bruyère—answers this question in the negative. He says : “ There are frightful and horrible calamities which we dare not think of, and the mere sight of which makes us shudder. If it happens to a man to encounter them, he finds resources in himself of which he was not aware. He stiffens himself against his misfortune, and bears it better



## Broken-Hearted



than he could have expected." Is it always so? Tennyson says :

Never morning wore  
To evening, but some heart did break.

It may seem absurd to interpret poetry as an arithmetician would interpret it, but is there not a curious moderation in this statement? I will not say that Tennyson meant that one human heart was broken every day, and that three hundred and sixty-five were broken in the course of a year. But perhaps it is permissible to suggest that he knew that the broken-hearted were few, but that they did exist. By the broken-hearted, I mean those who, after their great calamity, are never again really happy.

Are not hearts sometimes broken for love, and never healed again? Mr. Hardy is commonly supposed to have reached the climax of tragedy in *Tess* when he says : " ' Justice ' was done, and the President of the Immortals (in Æschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess." But I think the climax of the tragedy is in the closing sentence of the book : " The two speechless gazers bent themselves down to



## Broken-Hearted



the earth, as if in prayer, and remained thus a long time, absolutely motionless : the flag continued to wave silently. As soon as they had strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on." Let it be remembered that Tess had besought her sister to marry Angel. When Tess was scarcely cold, the two, after a brief pause, went out into the world together. What a picture of the fickleness of human love ! that fickleness which, in Mr. Hardy's view, is the last tragedy of life. If all lovers were fickle then there would be no tragedy, but it is because there is constancy on one side and fickleness on the other that agony begins, and will not cease. I am not speaking of the ordinary proposal and rejection, when a suitor is dismissed with a homily, a pastoral benediction, and the honorary rank of brother, and sets out to seek another mate the same evening or, at the latest, the next afternoon. All hearts are not like that. Who can forget the madness, if it was madness, of Farmer Boldwood in *Far from the Madding Crowd* ? "The only signs of the terrible sorrow Boldwood had been combating through the night, and was combating now, were the



## Broken-Hearted



want of colour in his well-defined face, the enlarged appearance of the veins in his forehead and temples, and the sharper lines about his mouth. . . . The clash of discord between mood and matter here was forced painfully home to the heart ; and, as in laughter there are more dreadful phases than in tears, so was there in the steadiness of this agonised man an expression deeper than a cry." Love has much grief as well as much gladness to answer for, and Miss Mary Robinson's poem, " Le Roi est Mort," has a meaning :

And shall I weep that Love's no more,  
And magnify his reign?  
Sure never mortal man before  
Would have his grief again.  
Farewell the long-continued ache,  
The days a-dream, the nights awake ;  
I will rejoice and merry make,  
And never more complain !

King Love is dead, and gone for aye,  
Who ruled with might and main,  
Nor with a bitter word one day  
I found my tyrant slain.  
And he in Heathenese was bred,  
Nor ever was baptised, 'tis said,  
Nor is of any creed, and dead  
Can never rise again.



## Broken-Hearted



Bereavements sometimes kill at once, and in many cases, although the pain is softened by the lapse of time and by new friendships and associations, they are never remembered without a sharp pang. Sometimes they really kill one life of the spirit, though another rises in its stead, and the world thinks that the two lives were one and continuous. The most powerful and painful account of this will be found in the preface which Mrs. Oliphant wrote for her novel *Agnes*. She wrote the book after her only daughter and most beloved little companion was suddenly struck down. Years after she says: "Now and then my mind fixes on one point, till I get almost to feel as if it was I who had sacrificed my child. First one thing and then another, and my thoughts settle on that, and go round and round it till I feel as if my head was going." Years after, when her last child died, she broke down. She was still able to do work, but her nights were spent in sleeplessness and in tears, and her heart was broken. She was very glad to die, and the news of the beginning of the end was most welcome, and received with the greatest serenity and happiness.



## Broken-Hearted



She was "sick of believing, sick to see and know." I doubt if true mothers ever forget their lost children. The heartache of a mother who has lost a child is never ended, though it sometimes sleeps.

A great disappointment will sometimes permanently darken a whole life and cut it short. *The Life of Frederick Robertson of Brighton* is the saddest book I know. He was so young, so gifted, he seemed to have all the sources of happiness within his reach, with his wife, and his little children, and his work, and his faith. Nothing, however, seemed to touch more than a moment the profound melancholy which was his constant mood. In his biography no light falls on the pages from his little children. Wife and mother are hardly named. His work, outwardly and inwardly successful as it was, seemed to bring him nothing but bitterness, and even his sincere faith opened no fountain of gladness in his heart. One who knew him well attributes his gloom in a large measure to the disappointment of his early ambition to be a soldier. This was the great longing of his heart from the first, and it grew into a settled purpose. When his father proposed to him





## Broken-Hearted



the Church for a profession, his answer was decisive. "Anything but that," he said. Yet it came to pass that he entered the Church, and did his life-work there. Notwithstanding, often, when passing a soldier in the street, he would say: "Well, so I am to have nothing to do with them." I do not attribute the terrible melancholy of Robertson entirely to this. There must have been physical sources besides. He was born with a temperament not easily brightened, with a heart that asked more than life has to give, and which could not make much out of little. Yet the first disappointment was never got over. It is of no use saying that he would not have been happy in the Army. Probably he would not have been happy anywhere, but there is a certain content comes to a man when he has his own way. Besides, the bitterness of disappointment is often greatest when the loss sustained is imaginary rather than real. I am sure hearts are sometimes broken simply because a certain position has been denied, a certain career closed. The imagination lingers vainly upon that, and spurns whatever good there is in the everyday existence.



Shame is very hard to get over. When we can keep our griefs to ourselves or to a small circle, the chances of recovery are numerous. Once they are told to all the world, once we are publicly disgraced, it seems as if the brightness of life had gone for ever. In these times everything is soon forgotten, but the readers and admirers of Montalembert will not forget his tribute to his friend Lamoricière. General Lamoricière died in France more than thirty years ago, amidst such mourning and indignation as has seldom been manifested at a funeral. And Montalembert's tribute expresses the thrilling passion of bitter wrong and grief. Lamoricière had a wonderful career as a soldier, and even as a statesman. He was at one time Minister of War to the Government. Just as he was at the height of his fame, at forty-five, his military and public career was suddenly ended, by one of those miracles of inconstancy and ingratitude of which France has sometimes shown herself capable. He was thrown into disgrace, condemned to inaction and nullity, to "those rendings of impotence, that deadening disgust, that nakedness of books and the daily



## Broken-Hearted



walk, the weariness of 'unoccupied life.'” He did his best, and chose for his habitual reading *The Imitation of Jesus Christ* and other such books. But the picture of what remained to him is the grey vignette of a life in death, and this though he suffered to the end and overcame, bearing the injuries of fate with a Christian gravity and modesty. The trial was endured, the defile traversed, the yoke borne to the end. Still Montalembert says: “We cannot reveal all, and what we can say is nothing beside the suffering which we have seen, felt, known, and shared.”

There are men, and women too, who never recover the loss of faith. A. H. Clough will occur to every one as an example of this. He was broken-hearted; though he struggled for a time, it was not for long. G. J. Romanes was another, though he found his way back to faith. “The two most precious things,” he said, “in life are faith and love. The whole thing is vanity and vexation of spirit without faith and love. Perhaps it is by way of compensation for having lost the former that the latter has been dealt me in such full measure. I never



## Broken-Hearted



knew any one so well off in this respect. Still even love is not capable of becoming to me any compensation for the loss of faith."

I will end with what is perhaps an anti-climax, and will fortify myself with the authority of La Bruyère. He says that the only grief that time does not soften is the loss of property. La Bruyère was anything but a cynic. He was grave and compassionate, as well as rigidly veracious. If you will think of the misery caused by such collapses as those of the City of Glasgow Bank and the Liberator Society, you will understand. I have never known any grief that ended life very quickly, except this single grief of sudden and unexpected pecuniary ruin. Failures like these I have named led in many cases to death or madness. Even when there was fortitude enough to go on with life, the life was often permanently shadowed and embittered. It is so very hard to go on for years and years accumulating by strict frugality a provision for one's self and one's own family circle, and see it all swept away in a moment by the deceit of the men we have trusted. Young men can renew the battle; so



## Broken-Hearted



can middle-aged men, though they see very well that it means that they must struggle to the very end, and that the end is nearer than it would otherwise have been. But when one is old and weary, and cannot hope to do much in making the loss good, and is condemned to witness, hour by hour and day by day, the privations which he had toiled so hard to avert from him and his, the bitterness seems incurable, the loss without recovery, the life dashed in pieces.

I have said nothing in this letter of the consolations of Christianity. It may suffice to recall that the last book ever written by John Bunyan had for title, *The Excellency of a Broken Heart*.

## XXVII

### *The Innermost Room*

I BELIEVE that every human being has an innermost room in his soul, into which he never admits any one—perhaps because he cannot. When a boy, I was deeply impressed by a passage in John Foster's Journal, in which he says that when he entered a company he was often shy at first, but was reassured when he bethought himself that, after all, no eyes could see what was passing within his soul. It is true we are not known, even when we are well known, by those who live with us, by those who are bound to us by the firmest ties, or by those who have shared with us the closest intimacies of friendship. We have deep secrets, all of us, even though there is nothing in our lives over which we try to cast a veil. We are not known even when we die, and all that can be revealed is revealed, when the secret



## *The Innermost Room*



drawer in our desk is opened, and the lock of the child's hair, "hair that drained the sun for gold," the two or three faded letters, the ring, the photograph, have all been looked upon reverently or irreverently. Our secret has died with us. They have not spared Charlotte Brontë. They have published almost every scrap of her handwriting, and sold almost every one of her few possessions, and criticised her, and theorised upon her without stint. But her secret went with her, I have no manner of doubt.

At times in our life we are always living in the innermost room, even though we seem to be busy in the outer court. We cannot live anywhere else. But, for the most part, we repair to it only at intervals. The board is spread in the other chambers, and they are crowded and cheerful. We have upon us the stress of life, the hard task that has to be accomplished in the short day. Yet even then at intervals we suddenly quit our surroundings. Have we not seen that look in the eyes, which tells us that even the nearest and the dearest have flown from us to a restful or wistful solitude? And whither they go we cannot come.



## *The Innermost Room*



Sometimes an irresistible impulse comes over a man. He leaves his office and his books for a lonely walk, or he goes, because he cannot help himself, into a quiet room, where he may be alone for a little with his own thoughts. If he cannot quite escape, you will see him in that reverie, that brown study, which is passed not nearly so much in thinking as in feeling. Just because it is spent in feeling, its experiences can never be completely expressed in words. Or you may not have visited the innermost room for months and months, but there comes a time of release when you go on holiday, and find yourself alone in a foreign hotel. Even amidst the crowd of new objects that solicit you, you will spend most of your time, not in the foreign city, but in the innermost room.

Look around the innermost room, and you cannot explain how it has been built and furnished. It has built and furnished itself. You gaze at its pictures, its trinkets, its stains of blood, with a dull wonder at the sight of them. These, you think, should not be there. Other things should be there that have been





## *The Innermost Room*



of more consequence. There have been days in your life, apparently much more important days, that all may know of, when you were crowned in the eyes of men, or visibly struck to the earth in humiliation or woe. How has it come to pass that these days are not recorded in the innermost room? There are faces that you have gazed into for years and years, and these have vanished; but on the walls of the innermost room other faces are hanging. The stress is not laid where observers might think it should be laid, where you think yourself it should lie. Life, as it shapes itself to you in the innermost room, has its days, its ghosts, its treasures, but how they have ranked and ranged themselves there you do not know, and therefore can never tell. That is why you cannot admit others into the innermost room, though you were ever so willing to bring them. There may be nothing to hide, but somehow no one can enter, because the door will open to none but yourself. You know that none may enter it now, and yet fancy that once there were those who entered it with you, and sigh for their presence.



## *The Innermost Room*



But in the other days 'twas otherwise ;  
Silence itself conveyed with tender breath  
That thrill of sound wherein the difference lies  
'Twixt life and noiseless death ;  
In the soft air there rose a murmur sweet,  
A hum of voice and words,  
A sound of coming feet,  
A ring of soft accords,  
That entering in, filled all the inner room  
With friendly faces bright,  
Where there were ceaseless whispers in the gloom,  
And laughters in the light ;  
And save some sudden thought fantastical  
Might flutter in a maiden soul,  
There all was known to all,  
And shared both joy and dole ;  
Making divine the common days  
With dearest blame and sweetest praise.

It is a dream. The door was as fast to the dead as it is to the living.

The innermost room may be a torture chamber, or a shrine of peace. According as it is one or the other, so is life happy or unhappy. For the blessedness of life does not so much depend on what is passing in the outer chambers, as on what is passing in the secret place of the soul. It is because we forget this that we blunder so much, strive so hard, are so bitterly



## *The Innermost Room*



disappointed with our so-called successes. In the innermost room remorse may be present, infinite repining, infinite sorrow. The very thought of entering it may be an agony, but enter it you must. An unseen force drags you into the place of pain. Or it may be a shrine of rest, a refuge from the storms of life, a veritable chamber of peace. To visit it, to linger in it, may be the chief joy and solace of existence. One may come from it with radiant face and strong heart, able to cope with his difficulties, and perform his allotted task in another spirit. Is this the last word? No; the riddle of life is never understood until we know that the torture chamber may become, not all at once, but by sure and slow degrees, a shrine of peace. Most of us know how this comes to pass in sorrow, how a sober joy at last replaces the bitter anguish. It may even come to be so where there has been shame, and treachery, and base surrender of the will. The test of the true religion may be found here. The religion that we need is a religion that will lay all the ghosts, that will cast the instruments of torture from the innermost room,



## *The Innermost Room*



that will divide the great glooms, and make it a place of repair. And this is why we must always say to the sufferer, in his most cruel hour of endurance: "Hope on, hope ever. It will not be always as it is now. The place to which you are now dragged, as by furies, may come one day to be your sure and chosen home. You will one day want nothing better than the peace of the innermost room."

I love to think of the solitude of the soul, There is no characterisation of human beings that is more hateful and more false than the common saying that there is nothing in them. There is the innermost room. Every human soul is a mystery to the soul that knows it best, and should, therefore, be held sacred. Clouds and darkness are round about it. You may spend hours of every day for years with one whose innermost thought you have never once surprised. Even the child on the street, who runs your message, lives in a world to which you have no entrance. What one knows of himself should teach how little he knows of other people; should deliver him from too much dependence on their judgments, whether



## The Innermost Room



favourable or unfavourable. They cannot judge, because they do not know.

I am not so good as I seem,  
Yet I seem not so good as I am.

The last judgment of our life must be a judgment of what has passed in the innermost room.

And if *thou* wilt, draw near, O unknown friend !  
Thou somewhere in the world apart,  
To whose sole ears ascend  
The outcries of the heart ;  
Thou all unknown, unnamed, and undivined,  
Who yet will recognise  
That which, 'mid all revealings of the mind,  
Was meant but for your eyes.  
If you should e'er come sudden through the gloom,  
In any shape you list to wear,  
I wait you in this silent room,  
With many a wonder for your ear.  
For you the song is sung, the tale is told ;  
For you all secrets are,  
Although it was not thus of old ;  
And the door stands ajar,  
To let you lightly in, where I alone  
Wait in the silence, O my friend unknown !  
Who, in the noon of life, when gladness ends,  
Art nearer than all friends.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

Los Angeles

This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

DISCHARGE-URL

JUN 16 1985

JUN 9 1985

NOV 03 1986

RECEIVED

JUN 10 1986

PR

5110

Nicoll -

N547 1

Letters on  
life



3 1158 00000 434

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000 375 943 8

PR

5110

N547 1

